PILGRIM CHEER

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PILGRIM CHEER

A BOOK OF DEVOTIONAL READINGS

BEING

Extracts from the Manuscripts of Sermons

BY THE LATE

REV. J. P. STRUTHERS, M.A.

MINISTER OF THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, GREENOCK; AUTHOR OF "THE WORD AND THE ROAD," AND "STORIES TWICE TOLD"

"Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage."—*Ps.* cxix. 54

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PREFACE

THE very friendly reception given to "The Word and the Road" has led to the preparation of a second volume of extracts from the manuscripts of sermons preached by my husband.

Again it is necessary to emphasize the fact that these selections are copied from *notes* only, the sermons having never been fully written out, and for this reason they may seem to be fragmentary. As an incentive to their publication, may I quote what Dr. Denney wrote after his friend's death. "I am sorry you think nothing could be saved of his sermons. It was here he was original, deep, and tender and searching, like the Bible itself. I know he did not write them out fully, but I fancy he must have put down some indication of what he was going to say, and often that is the most interesting form of record —although one has to put a mark of interrogation. *Pascal pensant* is more interesting than '*Les Pensées de Pascal,*' and we get a more vivid impression often from notes than from a 'finished' work."

A.L.S

GREENOCK, 1924.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Joseph's Blessing	9
Prayer is the Burden of a Sigh	12
The Risen Jesus on the Shore	15
Swearing Forbidden	19
Peace Upon Israel	22
Death Disarmed	25
Sharpening Our Tools	28
Through the Waters to Christ	32
Sanctified for Communion	35
Benefits Forgot	38
The Law of Answer to Prayer	41
Under the Rod	43
The Dead Child	46
Christ's Empty Tomb	51
Bethel Forgotten	54
Horses for the Sun	58
The Goodman of the House	63
Moses' Evening Prayer	66
A Midnight Adventure	69
The Winter Solstice	72
Aaron's Blessing	75
His Deposit and My Deposit	78
The Lesson of Lot	82
Thomas Absent	85
The Law of Love	89
Paul's Well-fought Battle	93
Mirth and Song	97
Jesus' Mother Given to John	100
Bearing Our Burdens	103
Thou Shalt Not Steal	106
Captain of the Lord's Host	109

Contents

	PAGE
Atonement and Resurrection	113
Death a Solemn Certainty	116
Peter Rebuking and Rebuked	119
Angels Our Servants	123
Gehazi's Sin	126
Praying Always	131
A Man in Christ	133
The Sleep of Death	137
They Need Not Depart	140
Peter's Concern for John	143
Nearing the Shore	146
Christ Writing on the Ground	149
Naomi's Return Home	154
Paul's Unanswered Prayer	157
The Wine of the Kingdom	161
Digging Wells	165
Abraham Entertaining Strangers	167
John's Humility	170
The Silver Trumpets	173
Joseph and Mary	177
God's Burden-Bearers	180
The Last of the Levites	184
The Sacredness of Life	188
Satan's Lying Claim	191
A Sanctuary for the Provoked	195
Peter's Exhortations	198
The Gold of the Temple	202
Jesus and His Brother	205
The Forgotten Sheaf	208
The Potter's Field	212
A Daughter of Abraham	215
Is Paul a Boaster?	218
Learning to Pray	221
Stewards of the Mysteries of God	226
Yet There is Room	230

JOSEPH'S BLESSING

GENESIS XLIX. 22. PSALM I. 3.

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall."

THE chief thought in Jacob's mind is, very evidently, that of exuberant fruitfulness. Some of the blessings here given to his sons can only be called so on the ground that it is a blessing to have the truth told us in time, before the great gulf is fixed—well to have the dangers pointed out. Some of the tribes are spoken of as hateful and haters, idle and selfish; but others, like Levi, by repenting got the curse turned into a blessing. You remember that awful phrase in the Epistle of Jude (R.V.)—"Autumn trees, without fruit!": the season has come, and come in vain. But here Joseph is like the tree in the first Psalm, yielding his fruit, fed with God's own stream, living for others, disappointing no one.

One is sometimes tempted to think that it is sin that has made such a thing as a wall. A wall means something for separation, defence, personal ownership, privacy. However that may be, God in His providence has made use of walls. There are fruits which could hardly have grown when

man was in a state of innocence—they need a wall to rest on. It is a wonderful proof of the way God accommodates Himself to us. A wall shelters from the cold, wind, and storm, and, not least, it retains the heat of the sun and turns, as it were, night into day.

" Over the wall " means out into the unknown. The love of adventure, of pushing out and on, is part of a boy's birthright, whether it be new lands or new stars, new trades, new sciences. There's no man in history, no discoverer, no traveller, no inventor, no prophet—no Moses, or David, or Paul, or Luther, or Knox, or Livingstone, who has not been like a bough pushing out into the unknown.

The bough goes to the *out*side—to the other side. We all know the attraction, when we are young, that the top of a hill has—we wish to see what lies beyond, to have a big view. Two neighbours talking over their garden wall is a familiar sight. The wall marks the boundary, and many of us know what disputes have arisen about that, but here God wants to show how friendly He wishes men to be. The fruit-bearing bough is a symbol of brotherhood. It is like one owner sending to another an olive leaf—a little present, a gift that maketh room for itself.

Or if the wall be one that adjoins the highway, it is God saying—" Thou knowest the heart of a stranger." Think of the wayfarer, the child, the

prodigal. Think of hungry saints, apostles, Christ Himself. God gives us all not only bread for the eater and seed for the sower, but also a portion to give away.

The bough runs over to the sunless side—the cold side. That was true of Joseph in the prison. We all meet people less favoured than ourselves. Have you any books? Then lend to those who have none. Have you leisure? Visit the lonely. Weep with them that weep. Have things prospered with you? Remember the disappointed. It is right we should carry our fruits across; for, little as we mean it, it is our wall that has made the other side cold. We have impoverished the lives of others. And at the same time we are indebted to them, for our roots are nourished in their country. There is communication underground. The roots and the branches balance. "I am debtor," said Paul, "both to the Greek and the barbarian." Don't grudge what you give away—especially to the heathen. They spread our table. They minister to us of their temporal things: is it too much to ask that we should minister to them spiritual things?

PRAYER IS THE BURDEN OF A SIGH

JEREMIAH XV. 15. PSALM CXXXIX. 1–4.

"Thou knowest."

ONE of the most famous Jewish women of last century, a woman whose life was a strange mixture of fame and shame, a woman whom thousands worshipped, and yet who was left to die alone in misery, asked that these words and these alone should be written on the stone that marked her grave—a woman who knew the extremes of poverty and riches, honour and dishonour.

Many of us no doubt have used them ourselves in our hours of darkness—have seen a time when no other prayer seemed to suit our case. There was no other attribute of God we could get a hold of, or keep a hold of, no other that seemed to give us rest.

Why is it such a powerful argument with God? Why such a helpful one to us?

It seems abrupt; it has a beginning but no end. Does it not seem unnecessary? Of course He knows. It is incomplete. It implies knowledge and yet it tells nothing. What then? It

has value, first of all, because it is an approach to God. At first it does not appear to be so. It just states a fact and states one which if true needs no statement. It tells what needs no telling. Most of us have felt the difficulty of knowing what to pray for. Now, " prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed." A prayer does not need to have so many distinct kinds of address in it. It may be the most incoherent, inconsecutive of all speech. There is nothing so incoherent, one might say, as a child's cry of " Mother." If you examine it grammatically, it is only a beginning, but it is a beginning that denotes a relationship. The word has infinite meaning for the child and also for the mother. And the tone in which it is uttered is the prayer. Another may wait a moment before she answers the cry ; but if it be heard by day or in the silence of the night, no mother can resist it. Even so with the child of God. Many a time he but utters the Divine Name : " Lord God ; my Saviour." Or there may be no name, but simply the words of distress, " I thirst." Or there may be no words uttered—" I watered my couch with tears."

If we but touch the hem of His garment we shall be made whole. Yet there is a stronger faith that does not need a touch, that is content with but a look, that rejoices in a thought of Him.

Now, if there be faith in uttering a name, a request, in spreading, like Hezekiah, a letter before the Lord, in longing, in thirsting after Him, there is appropriating faith in this cry—" Thou knowest." It lays hold on God. There is the sense of relation, a right to speak, a readiness of access. There is an apprehension of God and His character. What is the use of telling God if He knows ? it may be said. No use certainly if that is all. But the glory lies not in the *fact*—but in our laying hold of the fact. It means I rejoice that Thou knowest. The value of the expression lies in what has to be understood.

The text lays hold on all God's attributes. It implies God in all His fulness—His eternity. If He knows everything, He must have known it from the beginning. It implies He is everywhere present, that He watches over all His creatures. It implies Divine power. It implies His interest in us. Are not our tears all in His book ? Does not His Spirit follow us wherever we go ?

And, above all things, it implies that there is a God of Salvation—looking at sin, hating it, to Whom we can come no matter how bad we are, no matter how weak our faith is, if we can only say, " Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee."

THE RISEN JESUS ON THE SHORE

JOHN XXI. 5. PSALM CXI. 5.

"Children, have ye aught to eat?" (R.V.)

THE whole of Christ's life was a manifestation of God in flesh. In the days before the Resurrection it was His flesh, His weakness, His humanity, that were visible. Now that He is risen, it is God in flesh without humiliation, and so there is a difference between the old appearances and the new. Before the Resurrection we cannot help feeling "How like us He is!" After, we say—"It is the Lord." Before He died, He companied with His disciples, was their constant companion, only separated as members of a family are for a few hours or minutes at a time during the day, or when He left them to pray. But now He comes and goes like a Master of the Household, Who goes into a far country, Who gives no account of His doings. They did not say—"Whither goest Thou?" That was one of the questions that perhaps never occurred to them to ask. They were too glad to see Him. Their hearts were too full, and even while they gazed He would vanish out of their sight.

I don't think we do wrong in wondering—'Rabbi, where dwellest Thou?" There were forty days at the beginning of His ministry when He was driven into the wilderness and He saw the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time from the Devil's point of view—their power and their glory. I don't think it wrong to imagine that God would soon show them to Him from God's point of view. These were not idle days. There was no need now for Him to sleep—one moment in glory refreshed Him after all His sufferings. No need for Him now to sit weary by the well. No need to walk slowly and painfully. No need for an ass to ride on. Perhaps He visited all countries, so that in glory He will be able to say—"I saw you all these years. I have been in your land. I saw thee under the fig tree." They could not have been idle days, for John says that if all the things Jesus did were written the world would not hold the books that should be written. We have but a few of His appearances, but these few show what He did—He went about continually doing good.

Again, we see His majesty in that word, "Children." That was not His usual way of addressing them. He was but thirty-three years of age. Most of His disciples were probably older than He. But now Godhead and Humanity are glorified together. Time was when as a little

child He gazed at the High Priest and doctors, asking them questions: now He is the Ancient of Days, full of glory as well as of grace and truth; and as He looks at His disciples from the standpoint of Almighty God they are but little children.

We see His majesty again in the way He deals with *us*—after His sovereign pleasure, not as we would expect. Remember these were the best men in the world, who had seen Him in His humiliation, who were specially to be His witnesses, who had grasped the great truth of His Godhead and Messiahship, who were to conquer the world for Him, who were to write the Gospels, to live and die for Him, and yet He lets them know what want and poverty are. They had seen strange things these last days and would be tempted to sit down and wonder and think. They were told to wait for the Holy Ghost.

But He dignifies and glorifies our daily life. Let us never forget the glory of work. Christ was a carpenter Himself, and before the disciples go out to redeem the world He makes them work; ay, after they have gone out they have still to work, like the Apostle Paul. They are to be willing to work and at the same time to be allowed to want.

Yet He cares for us. "Children, have ye any meat?" They had toiled all night and were now coming to the shore. Their work had been a

failure; they had no food and a weary day was before them. Many of you are out of work at this time, looking forward with fear to the coming winter, and as you see these recurring times you wonder at it. Remember Christ stands by the shore. And if ever a day comes when you have no meat, never doubt but that Christ will provide. He knows what hunger and thirst are. That trial is meant to do you good. Far better to catch nothing and have to fall back on Christ.

"The net brake not." I think we may say there is a proof of exaltation there. In all human things there's a touch of sorrow; in all joy, a touch of failure; something to remind us there is a better land. So in most of the miracles there is something to vex after all is done. Now the humiliation is all past. No humiliation in kindling a fire, or preparing a meal. They wonder at Him, They talk, they constrain Him. His first question is—"Have ye any meat?" The next is—"Do you love Me?"

There's glorious work for them to do, trials to face, worse than we have ever had—death coming, but all to glorify God. That is our chief end, and whatever happens, if we love Him, that is what we shall do.

SWEARING FORBIDDEN

MATTHEW V. 34. PSALM XCIX. 1–5.

"Swear not at all."

THERE is no sin more common in our midst than the sin of swearing—a sin not committed in provocation, but done deliberately. The very lowest view of it is that it is unworthy of our mind. It may add for a little a kind of unholy charm to conversation, but, when we think of it, it shows no wit, no inventiveness. The greatest fool can swear.

There are few gifts so valuable as the gift of brightening ordinary conversation by wit and humour and thought, but there is not one of these in swearing.

We can imagine a man—a godly man—in great excitement telling a lie, but to curse and swear is a peculiarly shameful form of sin. A lie is a sin that tries to hide itself, it is a sin that is ashamed, that pays respect to virtue. Swearing is a presumptuous sin, one that has thrown off all appearance of decency. The man who swears, in fact, goes out of his way to show how bad he is

It is a direct insult to God. We are not to take

His Name in vain, nor profane anything by which He makes Himself known. The name of Christ is that Name which is above every name. It is a name for adoration. Yet we hear it constantly in our streets, accompanied by coarse jesting, on the lips of men and women and even little children. The words that refer to everlasting destruction are too solemn. The word " hell " is no joke. To deliver us from hell cost the Son of God His very life.

In the orders to be observed by the Commanders of the Fleet under the charge and conduct of Sir Walter Raleigh, given at Plymouth, 3rd May, 1617, on the eve of setting sail for Guiana, the first two rules are these :—" I. Because no action nor enterprise can prosper, be it by land or sea, without the favour and assistance of Almighty God, the Lord and Strength of hosts and armies, you shall not fail to cause divine service to be read in your ship morning and evening, in the morning before dinner, and in the evening before supper, or, at least (if there be interruption by foul weather), once in the day, praising God every night with the singing of a Psalm at the setting of the watch. II. You shall take especial care that God be not blasphemed in your ship, but that after admonition given, if the offenders do not reform themselves, you shall cause them of the meaner sort to be ducked at

the yard-arm, and the better sort to be fined out of their adventure [that is the property sailors were allowed to take with them for trading in foreign ports]. By which course, if no amendment be found, you shall acquaint me withal, delivering me the names of the offenders. For if it be threatened in the Scriptures that the Curse shall not depart from the house of the swearer, much less shall it depart from the ship of the swearer."

By loving God and cultivating our minds and our eyes we may make our conversation so interesting that it will have no need for oaths and curses to give it an offset.

PEACE UPON ISRAEL

EXODUS XI. 7. PSALM CXXV.

"But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast."

WE see here the peace of the day of a sinner's redemption.

The Israelites might well have looked forward to deliverance with misgiving. For many generations they had been slaves, without pay, getting ill-usage, doing the hard, disagreeable work of their masters. The Egyptians could not now do without them. It meant they themselves would have to make the brick and do all the menial work of Egypt. The Israelites had become necessary to them, and therefore it was not to be thought that they would allow them to depart easily or quietly. Further, they had cruelly abused the Israelites, and nothing makes you hate a man so much as doing him a wrong. He is a living rebuke to you. A third thing would terrify the Israelites. There had now been for some weeks a succession of plagues, which had been brought on, there was no denying, in some way by Moses. They had been free from them. There had been loss of comfort, wealth, crops; the whole land had been

impoverished, and the Egyptians exasperated beyond measure. It would have been only natural if Pharaoh's army had risen up and swept them defenceless off the face of the earth. It is at such a moment that God comes and says, The result of all this storm will be perfect peace. Like all God's promises, this demanded faith. There is nothing harder than to change enmity into love. It would be a confession of defeat, an acknowledgment of wrong. But many of the people became friends. God softened and opened their hearts. Conquering the wrath of a nation was a marvellous display of power.

The same thing occurs on a far grander scale when a soul is brought to God. Satan does not willingly let us go. Too long has he found us useful. He carries on his sin by human means. So far as we can judge he does nothing without human help. Like the Egyptian, he hates us because he has wronged us. Every lost soul is to him an eternal enemy.

How wonderful it is that in the moment of our redemption and justification God takes us from the strife of tongues. In that hour of reconciliation the door is shut and we are alone with God, and there comes peace—perfect peace. This is not the believer's rest, but for him there is a little time of joy. As Bunyan said, " I was so happy I could have told the crows."

Pilgrim Cheer

More wonderful than the silence of the wild dogs that claimed the streets as their own every night, is the silence of the joy of God. The Israelites were unworthy to be saved. Yet there was no condemnation. God had forgiven them. And why ? Because another had paid their debt —joyfully—from all eternity, at God's own bidding.

DEATH DISARMED

I Cor. xv. 56. Psalm xvi. 9.
"The sting of death is sin."

There are some to whom death has no sting—the dead in Christ. They have fear enough beforehand, but as it comes closer and closer, fear vanishes. Death is but a shadow; till at the last it is welcomed eagerly. "Death to me is but as a bed to the weary," said the martyr, James Renwick. I do not think that is a feeling any of us should have so long as we are able to work for God. We must never seek to be relieved from work in the Master's Vineyard. But when night comes and our task is done and we hear the summons home, then dying becomes like any other duty—to be welcomed, longed for. Death has no sting, for there comes such a sense of forgiveness, such a humble, childlike faith in God, such a readiness to believe His simple word, such a desire to see Him face to face, to praise and bless Him, such a vision of eternal realities, that earthly things seem to vanish and death is a great deliverer and friend. Sometimes, I daresay, we have felt disappointed at the calmness with which

friends have bidden us good-bye. They seemed turned in upon themselves. But it was just because they were seeing things in their true proportion. Heretofore they have put eternal things in the background, now they are seeing " the King in His beauty and beholding the land of far-stretching distances." It is well that at the last the love of God should surpass all earthly interests. God had had too little of us, and so death comes and is welcomed by the dying Christian. He sees it coming and bids us good-bye smiling.

Death perhaps is most discredited when a man dies in a moment when he is ready for it. Death then seems contemptible. It has been met and faced and overcome in a moment. The battle has been fought and won before we were aware of it. There could be nothing better than such a death—a man working to the last, the last enemy brushed aside in the midst of other work; and if there is no sting before death, assuredly there is none after—not a moment's regret or pain, but a sense of instant, perfect forgiveness, an immediate entrance into Christ's bosom. " Thanks be unto God Who giveth *us* the victory."

Where is the sting? There is some sting in death to those of us who remain. The memory of harsh words and ungenerous deeds comes upon us with tremendous force. We wish we had the

dead back again to ask their forgiveness. Samuel Johnson, when a lad, once refused, out of foolish pride, to help his father to lay out his book-stall in the town of Uttoxeter. Fifty years after he walked into that town, and stood bareheaded for one hour on the site of his father's stall, amid the laughter and wonder of the crowd—with feelings that some of us can understand—to show his repentance for his disobedience.

Death does a good man no harm. It brings him to his rest. It unites him to God. But in the case of the ungodly death leaves *all* its sting. They who were warned and invited, and had perhaps determined to repent, but continued in sin, leave no hope in their death.

SHARPENING OUR TOOLS

I SAMUEL XIII. 20. PSALM CXLIV. 1.

"All the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share."

THE fact mentioned in the text is a very extraordinary one. The art of smelting iron, and of working it into all manner of shapes, had been known in the world for twelve hundred years, and the Israelites had not only known it, but had acquired such dexterity in working with metal that the very reading of what they had wrought for the Tabernacle three hundred and fifty years before makes one wonder. But they had lost the Ark, and with it apparently they had lost everything else.

We learn from this how sin degrades men's feelings, intellectually and morally. The first generation of a bad race may know many things that a superior race does not know, may surpass them in intellectual stature, apparently, as they do in physical. They are like the prodigal son, they use up their capital—they make a great display, but very soon they begin to be in want.

It was a deplorable fact that amongst the nation that had overcome Pharaoh, that had produced men like Moses, who was learned in all

the wisdom of the Egyptians—men like Bezaleel and Joshua and Gideon, there was not a single man who knew how to make a plough or sharpen an axe. In all the land was there no man who had the intelligence to watch, or devise means for watching, the Philistines at their work? Curiosity—the desire to know—to be interested in things is the first gift God gives either man or beast. And the man or woman who doesn't care to do so is in a bad way. It is the result of sin.

Was it cowardice? You remember how Gideon found means to thresh his wheat in the wine-press. There was at least some sign of mental vigour and courage and initiative there, and that was the man to whom God sent the Angel. But, it might be said, wheat can be threshed and the sound might not go far, but the clink of the iron on the anvil carries far and is as hard to hide as would have been the cries of Moses in his mother's house. But surely some lonely spot could have been found, and men could have watched for a favouring wind. It needed but little intellect to devise some plan. No, they were content to submit to degradation and insult, compelled to wait the Philistines' pleasure while the seasons passed, content to take a day's journey and wait till it suited the convenience of some worshipper of Dagon. The shortest road to stupidity is to leave the way of righteousness.

Can we sharpen our own intellectual tools? There are things which God wishes others to do for us, just as there are products of the earth which God wishes us to get from other nations. We are not to blame because we don't grow figs and oranges in Scotland. They require a sun which He has mercifully denied us; but He wishes us to grow the best wheat and oats and let no bit of land be unused. So in the intellectual world. There are things that are the special province of certain men, but the tools that I need for my daily life, if I cannot make them, let me at least keep them in good order. There are boys whose parents tell you sadly that they never open a book. These boys will grow up to have neither axe, nor coulter, nor anything. The wise man is not necessarily the one who has a great stock of information, but he knows where to find information. It's an education to be familiar even with the outside of books.

And as to spiritual things, there are questions of scholarship that you can't help yourself in, that no other can help us in, but for what we need in order to get our daily bread, for all that is necessary in our spiritual life, God gives us tools, and the means to keep these tools in order. We are to gather not a few grains only, but harvests, bread enough and to spare.

" The word of God is very nigh thee, in thy

mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it." You and I have not had to learn to smelt out the doctrines of Grace. That was done by the oil of many a scholar's midnight lamp and in the flame of many a martyr's fire—welded, polished, given to us—a whole armoury of God. Be it ours to keep it bright and in constant use, to know its capacity by searching out how it was made. Let us be mighty in its use, making each weapon our own, first of all, by appropriating faith, so that it shall no longer be a matter of tradition, or memory, or an affair of surroundings, but a thing we have dug out for ourselves. If you have to fall back on anyone, you have neither plough to keep yourself in life, nor sword to defend your life or save another's. God means us to be brave, winning kingdoms, fighting our own battles, sharpening our own weapons, putting on and never putting off any part of the whole armour of God.

THROUGH THE WATERS TO CHRIST

REV. XX. 13. PSALM LXV. 5.
"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it."

A LITTLE child who was often with us on the Sabbath day was taken away in very solemn circumstances on 19th October.* There is always a certain satisfaction in speaking of the death of a child. A grown-up man has faults and failings. We know his weaknesses, we never saw his greatness. To those who loved him his weaknesses wore a different look. But a little child has no history. I confess that I should like in any way I can to make a little child remembered. There is something touching in such a one passing away and leaving no mark. We can't pray for the dead, but we can add to their honour and joy hereafter. It will be one of the delights of Heaven to find we were better known and more beloved on earth than ever we imagined.

* The three-and-a-half year old son of Capt. Ralston when passing along the deck of his father's ship, the *Niobe*, homeward bound from Java, caught hold of a rope hanging from a sail. A sudden gust of wind filled the sail and the tightening of the rope jerked the child overboard. A young man instantly sprang into the sea and a boat was lowered, but the child was never seen again.—ED.

Through the Waters to Christ

Ordinarily, when death comes the man has done his work—is worn and wearied. Death is seen to be approaching. Just as when we look at the hiding of the moon's light, we see the shadow coming. But to be drowned at sea—there you have the strong life, hearty and cheerful, eclipsed in one moment. In this case death came immediately, from God Himself; a breath of wind filling a sail and the little one borne away. Could not God have prevented it? The trial is all the harder because we think He might have done so.

It is still harder at sea because we must part absolutely from the dead. Bad enough that we are glad to bury our dead out of sight, but yet their grave is green. The violet grows from their dust. But at sea we have to leave the dead. The ship cannot stay. The fondest mother cannot revisit the spot. She may not go to the grave to weep there.

In ordinary death we are standing by, silent, helping by our presence and our prayers. At sea we do not know what is happening, yet that very thought that no one knows makes God come nearer. Christ walked on the waters. We know the sea will give up its dead at the last day. Oh, the joy of that resurrection! How much to tell of God's grace and what was felt in those last moments that seemed so long.

Pilgrim Cheer

If it be true that the bodies of the dead are in God's keeping—and we know they are—it is specially true of those who are lying in the deep. God Himself has buried them, though no man knoweth of their sepulchre; and God Himself will restore them.

SANCTIFIED FOR COMMUNION

EXODUS XIX. 10–11. PSALM XXIV. 3.
" Sanctify them to-day and to-morrow, and be ready against the third day."

GOD wishes us to sanctify ourselves for our *daily* business. There is need for forgiveness, need for self-restraint, need for thankfulness, need for guarding against the mastery of the world. Every day is filled with God's love and care for human beings, but on a Communion Sabbath God asks us to think of the most awful hour that ever was.

Mount Sinai was the place of God's glory when He revealed Himself. There is no miracle or combination of miracles in the physical world to be compared with what God does in the matter of Grace. One would say that God's love could have been no greater than had already been revealed. There had been unspeakably great moments in Eternity. We cannot follow God there. God has no beginning. But what a thought that opens up to us : God for millions of ages thinking of sinners, putting forth on their behalf all the treasures of His wisdom, power and

love. What a strange moment when God was first confronted in actual fact with a sinful angel —and then with a sinful man ! What a moment when He repented He had made man—what a moment when He heard Christ, His dear Son, called a drunkard !

The Crucifixion was the most awful hour in history, the hour when God's anger and God's love were stirred to the utmost, when Christ's agony and Man's sin had reached their highest point. Yet God is still willing to think of that hour. The Lord's Supper is a token that God does not regret doing what He did—that if Eternity were to begin again He would go through it all.

And of course that means that God wishes *us* to see Him in His Glory. The Lord's Supper ought to be a solemn time to all sinners. It is a distinct, visible sign of what happened on Calvary. That is why I have always been anxious that the little children should be present and see as much of the ordinance as possible.

Looking back on my own early history, I have a clearer recollection of Communion Sabbaths than of any other. I remember many texts and the solemn tones of the ministers' voices. It is the grandest appearance of God possible, and it ought to be a time of saving souls for He reveals Himself in a very special way to His people.

Sanctified for Communion

A Communion Table is an unspeakably solemn sight. People are there of all ages, with all kinds of sorrows—persons silently making the great surrender, giving up, it may be, the hope of a life-time, pleading for help against a besetting sin, renewing their covenant, resolving to return to fight on the field of battle from which they had deserted ; some praying in anguish for the soul of a dear one, some in old age pleading not to be left alone, crying for help, thanking God for mercy, asking His Presence in the dark valley at whose entrance they even already are. Oh, what a time of free grace it is for the aged !

" Sanctify yourselves " means thinking a great deal about it beforehand. The Communion should be much in your thoughts. Don't try to banish it. Don't let worldly business occupy you unduly. Try to dispose things to avoid hurry and confusion. Question yourselves. Compare yourselves with one another—and with Christ. Ask yourselves " Am I holier than when I last sat at His Table ? " Have great expectations. Pray that some great thought might be born in your hearts. And the God of peace will reveal Himself to you.

BENEFITS FORGOT

GENESIS XL. 23. PSALM CV. 17.
" Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgat him."

THIS is a little page out of the book of the Lord's remembrance. It occurs in what we call the story of Joseph. God's remembrance embraces all men. Joseph is one of the great figures of this world's history. Even if the story of the first years of his life had been all that was told us, his life would have played an important part in that history. It occurs in the forefront of the Bible and is told with a detail that shows how much God loved to tell us of it. It is such a story as goes to the heart of everyone who reads it, a story that appeals to the commonest instinct of humanity, a story, above all, that ends happily, after God's own heart.

But the story of Joseph is not only a little drama in itself, interesting as a story of one man ; it played a big part in the history of the human race. It was one of the turning points of history and everything about it was great. It began with a boy's dream ; it was wrapped up in his coat of many colours. Our raiment plays no little part in yours and my career. It played a great part in

our Saviour's. That history turned again on a chance meeting in a field—in the overhearing of one sentence : " I heard them say, ' Let us go to Dothan.' " That man little thought he was setting a world of events in motion the day he said to the little lad—" What seekest thou ? "

But we have in this chapter the history of two servants—two working men; while other lives have been passed over with a word or two, the sad look on their faces has been recorded—the look of two prisoners—but that look was itself the sign of God's remembrance. He had visited them in the night season. God has ever been the God of the prisoner. I cannot help thinking that He specially thought of that chief baker. The personal attendants of despotic kings have been ever liable to suspicion. For your own sakes I trust you have often wondered why one was taken and the other left. This is an unfinished page. We cannot tell what records even yet may leap to light. Egypt is one vast land of graves, and these graves every year are giving up their secrets. Four thousand years have passed. We have heard that man's sentence. We have no evidence ; but is it not a touching thing that after all that time you and I are speaking about him this afternoon ? That man still lives—has another judgment to face. You and I shall listen to his doom or his acquittal, and he shall listen to

yours and mine. We have the story of but three days of his life. How many voices of God he had heard we cannot tell, nor how many he had silenced ; but we cannot doubt Joseph continued to speak to him of God, and of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Perhaps when Pharaoh's birthday feast had come, as happened on a like day in King Herod's history, it was the man whose head was cut off that had his head lifted up on high.

Amongst the things that God remembers is our forgetfulness. We forget experiences. We forget the vows we have made, but God often mercifully overrules it for good. If the butler had remembered Joseph at once he might perhaps have been rewarded—perhaps freed and let go. I suppose what Joseph would want was to get home again, back to the land of Canaan,the vale of Hebron. Had he been delivered, the work of preparation had been interrupted and unfinished. It was well for Joseph that the butler forgat him —well for the Egyptians—well for God's own people (Gen. xli. 57), and well for the butler that God brought him to see his selfish forgetfulness.

Blessed be God for all He brings to our remembrance, and blessed above all be Christ that He never forgot any—even when dying. " Remember me, when Thou comest in Thy Kingdom "—why, His Kingdom consists in remembering us ! He is " exalted to be a Prince and Saviour."

THE LAW OF ANSWER TO PRAYER

JAMES V. 7. PSALM CXXVI. 6.
"The husbandman hath long patience."

JAMES is talking about persecutions, ill-usage, injustice. He is not speaking of light trials, but of horrid cruelty and wanton murder of the poor by the rich. And the advice he gives is—Be patient, wait, hope, trust, and pray on.

He commends to us the example of the husbandman. After harvest the ground is parched and dry, but the winter rains mollify the soil. The seed is sown in early spring. Then come the latter rains. He has to wait nearly six months. But the harvest is gathered at last. He knows that the seed is living, that the soil is made for it. The seed wants to grow—it can't rest when spring comes. Give it moisture—give it even the call of spring, it begins to sprout. The spring is in the air. So with all our desires and prayers. Their very nature implies life. They grow, they get stronger, they must come to something. Prayer, hope, patience must find the reason of their being in fulfilment. And when prayer rises to the heart of God, when it is presented through Christ, when it is cleansed by Christ, when it has

Christ's infinite merit added to it, it is bound to come to something.

The husbandman has not only the seed but the experience of thousands of years to fall back on. It is a law of nature. The world could not have existed otherwise. So with those who hope in God. The saints have been trusting Him and were not put to shame. He is faithful Who promised.

The farmer has also his own personal experience. All he has, came the same way. It is a law he sees daily, hourly fulfilled. Bread on his table, meal in his barrel, fruit in his cupboard, every landscape, every stack-yard, every hay-rick, every garden, every tree, every flower, every blade of grass, is a proof of law fulfilled. We have got more prayers answered than unanswered. We get them answered every day, every hour, every breath. We in our own persons are the embodiment of a million answered prayers.

It is a proof of immortality. It binds race to race; it binds every race to God. We inherit from those who have gone before. We have our roots in the past. We have our heads in Heaven. The husbandman hath long patience—watered with hope, faith, love, trust and prayer.

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.

UNDER THE ROD

LEVITICUS XXVII. 32. PSALM XXIII. 4.
"Whatsoever passeth under the rod."

WHEN one uses this phrase one always means that God is punishing us. We in our unbelief imagine that the greatest part of our life is meant to be full of suffering, that God has, or seems to have, pleasure in chastising us. But no. He doth not afflict willingly. I would not make light of anyone's trials. Some of us looking back remember, perhaps, years full of trial—nothing but trial. We don't notice the mercy. We have to be stirred up to see it. Indeed, we anticipate and suffer trials that are never to come. We were taught every day to say "Our Father," and yet we go through life expecting blows.

We have all seen the shepherd and his crook, yet I don't suppose any one of us ever saw a shepherd *beating* his sheep. It is not the characteristic act of a shepherd—even of an earthly shepherd. It must vex God that we associate Him in our minds with trials.

The rod is used, first of all, in dealing with sheep one by one. There are times when the shepherd

deals with his sheep in masses—when he drives them as a flock—times when he forgets individuals or is careless about them. But when he numbers them, they pass one by one under his rod, or by threes in little groups. It would be a great thing for us to have God looking at us as a congregation, or even as a family. It would be a glorious thing if God even once, now and again, took notice of an individual, and we stood outside and said " He is gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." One personal dealing with God in a lifetime would be surpassingly glorious. But God does wish to show that He is looking at us every moment. " Adam, where art thou ? " " Where is Abel thy brother ? " " Enoch walked with God." " Thou God seest me." The Bible is full of personal narratives, showing how close God comes to us. After Christ's resurrection we should have expected a display of His majesty. No, it is simply—" Mary ! " " Go, and tell Peter." " Reach hither thy hand, Thomas." " Two of them walked to Emmaus." The hairs of our head are numbered. Be assured that this Sabbath not one of us is forgotten. We may forget one another's presence or be indifferent to it, but God is watching us each one.

It means more, it means each sheep is very close to the Shepherd, as near as can be. It means personal intercourse. We are not only numbered

but looked at. There is time and opportunity for recognition. "Some one has touched Me." We are being reviewed. We get an opportunity of speaking to the King. "What is thy petition?" We see His smile, His glory. "He is altogether lovely."

It means that God has a purpose concerning us. It is not simply a meeting and a parting. The sheep does not know what the Shepherd does. The rod is laid on it, it is marked out for some object. If we knew what God says to the angels about us it would fill us with astonishment. One of us is marked out for long life—for some high design; another is to glorify God by an early death. It is a great joy that all our way is naked and bare before Him.

What is the rod? The rod is a continuation of the shepherd's arms and limbs. He can't reach beyond a certain distance. A tool of any kind is the badge of insufficiency, the sign of power but the proof of weakness. But the Most High has all perfection. His rod means His loving, all-embracing arms. It means all He has—salvation, holiness, grace. "Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me."

THE DEAD CHILD

II SAMUEL XII. 23. PSALM XVI. 9–11.
"I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

THE death of a little child is a trial many of us have not been called to pass through and we may be tempted to think it has no lesson for us. But by considering it we may see a little into God's doings and consequently into God's love. I cannot hope to tell you, who have passed through the trial, anything, yet perhaps it may compel you to live the past over again, and the imperfection of my thoughts may by God's grace make you see how much you have learned that we who have not been so tried, are still ignorant of. When you find how much you know that we do not, it may incline you to bless God that you have been made to pass through this school of sorrow.

The first question that faces us is—What is their eternal destiny ? That is a subject on which we have to dwell with holy reverence. There is a strange silence in Scripture about it. Whatever is said seems to point in the one direction. This text gives us the case of a child born in the most shameless sin of its parents, and yet David's words are singularly triumphant. We must

remember this—that though we may not be able to prove it, children are sinners, else they should not die. They are saved by God's free electing love. We feel it must be so when we think of the glory of Heaven. If they have done nothing, as we have done, to deserve everlasting condemnation, they have done nothing to deserve everlasting life. It is a strange thought to enter the mind of man that he can win heaven by anything he can do. There is only One that has ever won eternal life by righteousness, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. He endured the wrath of God, the malice of hell, the hatred and distrust of the world. He is our Mediator, and God gives to us the same eternal life as He gives His Son. If sons, then heirs, heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ. That is the destiny of the people of God. They are one family.

Why does God give us little children only to take them away again? It seems so unnecessary that they should have been sent here for a few hours or months. It shows us God's love. You will not deny that it is worth while their being born to go to heaven. Why, if there had been only one little child saved Christ would have needed to die. The presence of one saint in glory binds the Godhead together in a way they were not united before. We sometimes think the presence of one saint more or less would make

no difference in heaven. Why, the death of a little sparrow arrests the attention of God. The death of a saint is dear in His eyes. The entrance of one soul into eternal life brings joy to heaven and satisfies the heart of the Son of God. It was worth God's while to create a never-dying soul —to lend it to us, because He wishes us to be one with Him.

Why does God take them away? Because of sin. I mean sin on our part, for death is the wages of sin. Death is a breach of what God intended. He never intended life to be given to be taken away the next moment. The heathen said, "Whom the gods love die young." But the greatest blessing God can give us, next to His grace, is a long life of service. Sometimes people are glad their children have been taken away when they see others acting foolishly or wrongly, lest their little ones should have grown up to go astray. Now, that is a natural thought, but a wrong thought. God could have kept them. You ought rather to be vexed that they were taken away from a world where so much was to be done. They that turn many to righteousness shall shine like the stars for ever and ever. Which has glorified God most—the Apostle Paul, John, Moses, or the little child that is remembered by no one but its mother? It is well to get the penny having wrought one hour, it is far better

to get it having borne the burden and heat of the day. But herein is the love of God made manifest. They are taken away, having apparently done nothing for Him, and yet by His grace we can be the means of winning crowns for them, so that not even one little child shall appear at last without one sheaf gained in the harvest field. I can but hint at a few things.

The little child that has been but a short time on earth has yet bound its parents' hearts together. By its sweet smile and loving ways it has driven them to their knees and made them wrestle with God. The person that has led us to pray has not lived in vain.

There is also the stirring up of ourselves to do our duty for those that remain. The little one taken away is conspicuous and powerful by reason of its absence. Many of us owe the godly upbringing we have received to the fact that we were baptized for the dead—that we found our parents' hearts made more loving and earnest by the pain of some bereavement.

And they shall have a wonderful work to do in heaven. They shall have to tell us how God works in the mind of a little babe by His Holy Spirit. That is a boundless ocean of love no man ever caught sight of or shall, till the whole length and breadth of love are opened up in heaven.

Will parents know their children? They will

not be children there. We think of heaven as a place for old and young. But the frailties and weakness, the wrinkles and bent back, the littleness of childhood, are all the marks of sin and imperfection. In heaven they shall all have the stature of the perfect man, like unto Christ's glorious body. Oh, the blessing of finding a child long parted from, whose very image has passed from the mind—the joy, not of resuming life with it, but of beginning it !

CHRIST'S EMPTY TOMB

JOHN XX. 6. PSALM XLV. 8.

"Simon Peter entered into the sepulchre."

PETER'S first feeling must have been one of shame when he saw what others had done for Christ. He had said, "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee both to prison and to death." "I will lay down my life for Thy sake." "Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee." But the time of the trial and crucifixion was to Peter a time of lost opportunity. He had followed—but far off. Then he came into the palace—only to deny his Lord. The look Christ gave him was a look of love, of sorrow, of invitation to repentance. He might still have followed Him, but another Simon had to take his place and carry the cross.

The disciples must have been astonished to see that Christ had actually been buried like a king. They would expect, no doubt, that His burial would correspond in some measure to His death of shame and obloquy. They never could have expected such a scene of magnificence, of royal splendour, as there awaited them. That rock-cut

tomb of Joseph's wherein never man had lain, with Nicodemus' princely gift of one hundred pounds' weight of sweet spices, was literally like a palace.

Sometimes we look back on a Communion season with a good deal of shame and disappointment. It was a time misspent, profaned, lost. Yet there were some who gave Christ of their best, some, perhaps, whom you and I would have regarded as the very last to honour Him, who had kept away from Him, half-hearted, but whose love had been drawn out and they did what you never would have believed them capable of doing, what you yourself once thought you, and you only, could have done.

Yet the disciples must have marvelled at the emptiness of the tomb as they drew near and looked in. They saw not only that Christ had been there, but that He had been there *living*—that it was He Who had left things as they were. Christ had risen, unwelcomed by the world, but accepted of God, and He had left that tomb like one who was glad He had been there. He had tarried in the grave; the folding of the napkin was at once the proof that He had conquered death and that He was glad He had died.

Was His message to Peter—" You are too late; I don't need you now; I have angels for My messengers; I am Lord of all and I can do with-

out Peter now as I have done without him in the past" ? Oh, no ! And so to all of us who have dishonoured Christ and denied Him and helped to crucify Him, God says, " Don't go away. Come back. Come and see the place where the Lord lay. He is risen—and risen for you."

BETHEL FORGOTTEN

GENESIS XXXV. 1. PSALM CIII. 1–5.

"Arise, go up to Bethel."

BETHEL had been a place of sorrow. One cannot help being vexed for anyone that has no home. There are so many in the world that have bread enough and to spare, so many houses that have guest-chambers unoccupied, so many that would willingly shelter the wanderer! That is one of the trying hours of life when we realize for the first time, by the want of it, what home was—one of the hard experiences sent to us to remind us of our need of a Father in Heaven and a house that can never pass away.

Never make light of home-sickness. Is it any wonder that a lad, who is a stranger in a strange land, is eager to make friends with anyone that will help to cheer him; that a sailor makes up with the first man or woman that smiles to him? We have much need to pray to God to forgive us for our thoughtlessness about strangers. Is it any wonder God calls Himself the stranger's God?

But if one is sorry for a lad or girl whose spirits

are easily raised if they are easily cast down, with health and strength, and life and hope, the future all before them and character unstained, can we help being doubly vexed for a wanderer who is far on in life? For Jacob, that night he slept at Bethel, was, at least, over seventy years of age. One who had been led and guided by his mother all his days, one who had never known hunger or want, who had been brought up in the wealthiest home in all the East, he had now to begin life for himself with nothing but a staff—a staff whose support was only a reminder of the far road he had to go—to be compelled to choose a stone to rest his head on. Is it any wonder that he lay down sad at heart, realizing now what home was, and what had been the love of that mother whom he was never to see more until death should bring her and him together again? Sad in any circumstances, but still sadder when he remembered that all his loneliness and want had been brought on him by himself and by his mother's too great eagerness that he should get the blessing. It was his brother from whom he fled. That brother he had deceived, and his father, old and blind, he had taken advantage of at the most solemn moment of his life. A weeping mother, a vexed father, a raging brother and an offended God! Truly his plight was woeful! To lead astray in prayer, to take the name of God in vain, to make

a curse out of a blessing! Sorry as we are for him, can we help feeling that he had only got what he deserved?

But Bethel had been the house of God and the very gate of Heaven. Great as was the divine mercy in choosing Jacob from his birth, that mercy was still greater in not casting him off in old age. Was any man less fit to inherit the promises of God? Yet is not that the last thing we learn—that salvation is all of free grace? If God help us, it is because He has laid help upon One that is mighty.

Look at the fulness of the blessing. The father's door is shut, but the gate of the Father's house above is opened wide. Every step takes him further from Beersheba, but nearer God. Wherever he goes God is there. A ladder—a ladder in constant use—angels descending with blessing, angels returning with faith and love and prayers; a ladder to be used every hour until the last hour when angels carry the soul to Christ's Own Throne.

Bethel had been a place of vows, and no wonder! Did ever night come down so sadly hopeless? Did ever man wake more joyfully? He could say to God, "Thou art with me; Thy rod and staff, they comfort me." Yet after all God had done, there is the old fear and doubt—"*If* God will be with me." Far better had he

said, "God *is* with me; whether He deliver me or not, this God is my God." It had been the sorest night of suffering he ever had, but the greatest night of privilege. We would have thought it had been bound to his memory with a threefold cord—yet it had all gone from him!

Thirty years had passed—years of mercy and trial. God had given him wives and children, flocks and herds, had delivered him from many perils, had reconciled him to Laban and Esau. Yet he forgot. Ah, that was the pity of it. He did not feel any necessity to go up to Bethel. Forgetfulness is a sin that leads to sin. He had not taught his children about God and his sons had gone astray. There had been crime and bloodshed, his name dishonoured, the whole family branded as liars and traitors. There had been false gods in their possession, and God had to remind Jacob of his vows. "Go up to Bethel."

Bethel was the place of new promises. You never go to God and come away empty. God did not take his love from Jacob. He renewed His oath.

After all, Bethel is but the outer court. The promises, howsoever many they be, still point us to the glorious future and lead us on!

HORSES FOR THE SUN

II KINGS XXIII. 11. PSALM XIX. 1–6.

"And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun."

THESE words give a striking instance of the vanity and emptiness of human hopes. Every man has a hope of some kind or other. It is impossible for the heart to remain empty. The man who says he has no hope is only trying to believe he has none—trying to sweep and empty and garnish his house. We may wrestle against God and try to quench His Spirit, but the Spirit returns and returns—there is the sound of a terrible knocking in our ears. There have not been many infidels who have had the courage of their convictions at the last, and the few who have, could not conceal that they were acting a part. Every one of us has a god of some kind or other. There is something ludicrous in the helplessness of false gods. You remember the story of Laban searching for his. They were hidden, he could not find them. That was all they were good for!

You say it was a foolish idea those kings of Judah had of making the sun their god, and giving horses to him. And yet the worship of the

sun was perhaps the very noblest worship a heathen ever imagined. To this day it is worshipped by thousands of British subjects. Any evening of the year you may see that worship going on at such a place as Bombay, where there are many Parsees. When it draws towards sunset you see some of the ablest and truest subjects of our Indian Empire coming with their wives to the beach, where they read their sacred writ and sing and bow before the sun. It makes one think. There is in the sun a strange nearness and a strange far away-ness. So near we can feel it ; so far off that the measure of its distance means nothing ; so small we can hide it with our hand, and the smallest blade of grass intercepts it ; so weak we can shut it out with stone and lime ; so strong that it controls our world and a thousand others and has controlled them for thousands of years ; so old that all the generations of men have gazed at it, and yet so young that it runs its race as a strong man and climbs the heaven. One would say it was a thousandfold better than any other god the heathen could devise. Yet as we read the verse we wonder at the stupidity of the man who would give it horses—the sun could not take them—would be none the better for them.

And wherein do we differ from these kings ? They gave their horses—their strength—the best they had. Every one of us has a god. It may be

our pleasure, or our pride, or our purse, or our honour. And, alas, there are some of these that keep us in heavy bondage. We do wrong, but we are ashamed to yield. We let opportunities go past us of doing good, of being friendly, of living happily, but we must serve our pride.

Do we not make a god of our future? What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed? Is not that the great grief of many of us? We toil as hard as we can. We lay past all we can. The strength of our days, of our heart, of our prayers, is all given to this future. Is that one bit better than giving horses to the sun?

We ought to keep everything in its own place. If you were to find fault with a Parsee for worshipping the sun, he would ask you if it were not worthy to be worshipped. The sun is a fact, and the future is a fact, and old age and poverty and loneliness and trouble are all realities. So is money, so is our own dignity and character. But we must keep them in their own place. We must not worship them.

The true way to see the value of anything is to look at it in the light of God. The sun is very glorious to a heathen, very glorious to the man of science, who weighs it and analyses it, but no man can love it aright like the sinner who is redeemed by grace, who looks upon it as the greatest marvel

of his Father's hand, an emblem of his Father's might and love—and yet a thing which shall pass away. So with everything else. A man may say, Am I not to look after my own dignity? Yes, truly, to sink it, to empty yourself of it, to make it one with the dignity of Christ Who was the Servant of the man who betrayed Him, Who is your Servant and mine at this moment, and the Servant of the man we would not deign to speak to!

Has money not its place? The man of the world knows its value—that every halfpenny can be made to add to fortune and lead him on to sit amongst the great ones of the earth; but none knows its value like the saint who remembers what two mites did, what pounds can do in winning souls, in cheering broken hearts.

The future has its own place. Why vex yourselves about it? Why, to know the future aright—trust God! Time but brings heaven nearer, and the end of our sorrows.

The horses did no good after they were given. So what you give up to your dignity, you lose by it. You vex yourself about the future: what do you gain by that? Have we not lost days, wealth, strength, all in vain?

God is the only person to Whom you may give anything and no one takes it from you. It is still yours. Your tears are in His bottle. Every

thought, every sacrifice, money, time, prayers—give them all up to Him and they are still yours, and will come back with a rich harvest. " Lay up treasure in Heaven."

THE GOODMAN OF THE HOUSE

MARK XIV. 15. PSALM CXXXII. 2-5.
"A large upper room furnished and prepared."

A GREAT honour has been put on the man in whose guest-chamber the Redeemer and His disciples were now met. His name is not mentioned. He had a chamber but no guests; was willing to entertain, but he lacked opportunity. Time enough to make the chamber ready when the guests appear—that is how the foolish reason. None may come, and if they do come, why, it can be made ready. If there is not time, let them be thankful for it as it is. But this wise man knew that it is God Who sets the time. The Divine command was very plain. At Passover time the house was to be swept, and searched with a lighted candle, that there might not be one particle of leaven or corruption. In other words, the house had to be ready in any case. It was well it should be clean; and so the man in faith and love and obedience was ready for a guest, if guest should come; and if none came, he had the satisfaction that none was turned away. The eye of God would see him, and so he will leave

nothing to the last moment. His guests, whoever they be, shall see that he was ready, that they are not putting him about. Therefore he completes his preparations and sends his servant for the water at the cool of the day.

He is another of those who in the Bible, like Rebecca, get the reward of courtesy. Our Heavenly Father knew too well Himself the pain of having all things ready and finding no one willing to come. We treat Him that way, but He does not treat us so. That furnished chamber was an invitation to Almighty God to send a guest in the richness of His Providence, and such guests were sent as no chamber in the world had ever received. Often, doubtless, like every Jewish child, this man had read of Abraham hastening to meet the angels at his door, had envied Manoah and his wife entertaining their heavenly messenger, had wished he too, like her of Shunem, could get a man of God to turn aside and eat bread with him and be refreshed. There was no intellect, no genius required. It was the simplest gift a man could have. He had a room and he kept it in order. And it was more than angels that he entertained. Christ had been refused a lodging in the inn in Bethlehem where He was born. There had been no room for Him there. Before another day should dawn there was to be no room for Him in the world: "Away with Him. Away with

Him!" But this simple act of faith must not go unused and unrewarded. This man found, like everyone else who makes himself ready in any way, that God used him exceeding abundantly, above all that he could ask or think. That upper room not only became the guest-chamber for that evening, but, as far as we can judge, it became the first Christian Church, the trysting-place for Christ and His Apostles after His Resurrection, the place to which the Spirit came like tongues of fire, a Temple of the Holy Ghost!

MOSES' EVENING PRAYER

NUMBERS X. 36. PSALM XCI. 5.

" And when it (the pillar of cloud) rested, he said, ' Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel.' "

WHEN we hurry home, our day's work done, to gather round our fires, when the nights are clear and dark, in the various observatories throughout our country the astronomers betake themselves to their telescopes to scan the heavens, watching intently some star or following some planet in its wanderings. There they watch all night till the day begins to dawn and the shadows flee away. It is a solemn thought. The text also suggests how a mother, having put the little ones to rest, long after they are asleep goes on mending, preparing, praying.

It is the close of another day's march. Pleasant though its incidents have been, from the gathering of the manna in the morning, all through the meal hours and the marching hours, the people are not sorry to see night come. Their flocks and herds are many, the little children have to be laid to rest, they are a day's march nearer the good land. So they make haste to pitch their tents, to light their fires, prepare their evening meal and

loosen their beasts of burden. And as they all busy themselves, Moses, the old man of God, who bears them all on his heart, stands on some little eminence apart, watching the four divisions of the host, three tribes in each, taking up their places. The tents are rising in goodly array, spreading over an extent of miles, and while the people are busy, he is praying, commending them all to God.

It is a short prayer, short because there is so much to pray for that it cannot be put in words. But the shortness of it makes one feel that God is very nigh—very willing to listen. It is but a word or two as if spoken to one close by. I wish we felt that God is actually nearer than any other is. We may have no time to prepare our words, but in a moment we can turn to Him, and before we speak our words are known to Him. That should comfort as well as warn us. He is not far from any one of us. Yet had not God already returned? The pillar of cloud had sought out the resting place. It was standing still! As the night came on it began to glow and then to burn with its strange glory. Was He not very near them?

Surely, it means this—that He was to return in *love*? For it is an awful fact that many a time God's wrath was kindled against His people deservedly. Moses knew what sin was. There

was a mixed multitude in that camp. There were ungodly Israelites, foolish, peevish men, easily led astray. The Devil going about as a roaring lion; a hundred temptations in every heart! How much lust! How much wickedness!

The evening prayer takes us back to the morning prayer with all its bright promises and hopes. What possibilities of joy to the Eternal God! How goodly are the tents of Israel if all served Him! But doubtless the promise of the day had not been fulfilled. There had been wicked thoughts, multitudes of transgressions, enough to drive away a holy God, in Whose sight evil cannot dwell.

And looking back, the cry of Moses' heart for himself and all the people is a cry for mercy. "Return, O Lord." It was a prayer for God's presence through the night—a prayer that should be ours every evening. We shall never know on earth how much God has done for us when we were sleeping.

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

MARK XIV. 51–52. PSALM CXIX. 61–62.

"And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body, and the young men laid hold on him: And he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked."

WE have here the tragedy of the midnight streets.

Most of us when we were young saw in this story only a touch of what one would call the ridiculous. It made us inclined to smile. The white figure flying along the street—it was what we call a comedy. But we don't smile now. To us who are older, it is a tragedy!

If any of you have ever occasion to be abroad late, you cannot help being struck by the signs of midnight life. The shadows cast by moving figures, the sound of music and dancing, the solitary light that means some student is burning the midnight oil, some mother is watching a sick child, a wife wiping the sweat of death off a husband's brow, or the dim light that means the presence of death. But there is life on the streets. The unsteady step, the unsteady voice, the mirth that is not mirth either to the singer or the listener, the footfall of the constable, someone

hurrying for a doctor, the homeless figure crouching against a wall—perhaps a mother out looking for an erring son or daughter. But one thing strikes you—if there be a disturbance of any kind, an accident or an alarm, in two minutes a little crowd gathers. Where have they all come from, one wonders. There are some whose work it is to be up all night. There are some for whom there is no sleep. There is a pathos in that.

This was the night of our Saviour's need—a wonderful night all through. He left the house with His disciples singing, praying. He was coming back betrayed, a prisoner, with His hands tied, insulted, surrounded by a guard of soldiers, but not one single friend. Jerusalem was a little city, and every street of it must have had for Christ the holiest associations. He had been the help of hundreds. Now He looked for comforters, but there was none.

It was a night of opportunity. To every one of us there is a time when we can show how quickly we can rise from bed. How it was this lad rose—whether God kept him awake till the tramp of an armed band and a following crowd struck on his ear, or whether it was Christ's thought of him and the Spirit's influence that roused him, or whether it was his mother that bade him rise hastily and see what was ado—we do not know ; but that lad had the grandest chance in the world that night.

A Midnight Adventure

He could have been a witness for Christ —a friend in court.

It was a night of failure. He could not face the insults, ridicule, the loud laugh of the bystanders —he fled. One wonders—one would like to know —how he spent that night. It is too awful to think that perhaps by many a roundabout way, yet as swift as might be, he ran home, perhaps told his mother what he had seen, speculated on what might possibly happen, and then lay down in bed—and, shall we say, slept ?

It is supposed this young man was John Mark. It was a night of warning. Most men have one great weakness and need one great lesson. How did I comport myself that night ? I fell there. The sins of youth are revealing—Satan will try to get another victory. Yet there was something brave about Mark. He followed. He had faith as a grain of mustard seed—aye and more—he went forth to conquer the world for Christ with Paul. And then failed a second time.

But it was a night redeemed. Mark was Paul's comforter in Rome and wrote the story of our Lord's life.

THE WINTER SOLSTICE

I KINGS XX. 22. PSALM LXXIV. 17.
"The return of the year."

DECEMBER 21 is our shortest day in the year. On that day the sun is as far away to the south of the Equator as it can possibly be, but on that day it stands still, so to speak. That is called the Winter Solstice. Then it begins to return. Just as when a ship rolls, it goes over and over, halts and then rolls back again.

We have cold and fog for many a day after that, but already nature is awakening. "Return" means the return of all that the sun brings —more heat, more light, leaves and buds and flowers, and singing birds. It means the departure of winter, the coming of spring, summer and autumn. It is the return of the whole circle of another year.

The return of the year means—who can tell how much?—work on the part of God. How much He has to do, not even the angels know. He has to satisfy the wants of every living creature. The fate of an empire, the destroying of a continent are in His hands, yet He has time and heart to hear a robin's song and to help the crocus to

thrust its spear through the cold hard earth. You and I postpone things. We say, " That can wait. It doesn't matter whether it is done or not " ; but God never puts off. He never changes His mind, or says, " It doesn't matter."

Return means faithfulness as well as favour. The 21st of December comes round because God said it would. The Psalm speaks of " that which witnesses faithfully in the heavens." He confirms the promise every time there is a rainbow.

It means that old years come back again. They come in memory. I wonder how often at the close of the year we recall the days that are past—sometimes gladly, sometime sadly. We watch the snow falling and we say, Do you remember the great snow-storm ten years ago? Do you remember the six weeks' frost in such a year, when no letter entered or left London for eight days ?

We recall New Year Days. Father and mother, we were all one family then, and now, scattered, separated by land and sea. Aye, and there are bitter memories !

It returns in character and experience. It is in life as in a garden. We say, " If all goes well I should have a good show and a fine crop next year." But what weeds we suffered to grow, and fall, and they are sleeping. They will waken. They will come back with interest. And who can

tell what events are to happen to us that will have been brought forward by our own acts? What large plots of our mind will have been wasted—what tasks and opportunities passed over to others? I trust we may say also—what kindnesses that will all be repaid! What prayers that will be answered! What fine occasions for the display of capacity and attainment!

It means a return of old temptations—old and seemingly dead. It is hardly possible to escape temptation at the close of the year. There is a real desire to make all things new and men are eager to show that, but many will renew their sin and find that the new year is just the old one back again—women dreading it, afraid if a man says he is going out for a newspaper—a return of passion and temper and strife and poverty and anxiety. And how many will date their first fall from the return of the year?

But it means God standing at our door with an offer of mercy and forgiveness and love. Let us make a new start—now—with the impetus of shame, confession, prayer and resolution.

AARON'S BLESSING

NUMBERS VI. 24–26. PSALM CXV. 12.

"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee;
"The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;
"The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

A BENEDICTION is a very remarkable form of words, as well as a very beautiful one. What is the exact meaning of it? When a minister says at the close of the day—"The grace of the Lord be with you," it is quite different from an ordinary prayer—different grammatically and with a different gesture. There are times, many of us know, when we stretch out our hands to God, when we pray more earnestly, when we strive, as it were, to get near Him and take hold of Him, like the blind man trying to detain Christ, or the woman who grasped His feet, or her who touched His garment.

But when the hands are lifted up in the Benediction it is not the sinner's arms stretched towards God, but God's arms stretched towards, and around, and over, the sinner. For the moment, the minister represents God, the uplifted arms mean the oath of God, the spreading arms mean

the encompassing presence of God—arms opened to let you come near Him—towards Him—close to Him. It means no enmity—no weapons in the hands. It means reconciled arms. It is a promise. It is an oath. At the time of the Benediction we part from one another, but at that very instant the blessing unites us, draws us close to one another and draws us close to God. We claim the blessing. It means boldness of access. It is in the imperative mood. We command, we prevail, we won't let go. It is a capturing of God, but, of course, the power that prevails is the power given us by God Himself. It follows that it is worth while coming to church even for the Benediction alone. People say " I would have been late. The sermon would have been almost over "—but the best of all is the table God spread Himself.

It means also that the blessing should be listened to reverently. Young people look on it as the signal for dismissal. They gather books together and make ready to go away. We should leave the House of God decorously, as those who are in heavenly places ; and however poor the sermon may have been, we should by look and deed show that we regard it as His House.

But what does the blessing imply ? It implies surely that our need is very great, that we are in

danger and need keeping, and keeping implies watching, guiding, protection, shelter. For we are in a world full of danger and we ourselves are blind, unconscious of our peril, rash, helpless. So much so, we need no less a Keeper than the Almighty God.

That word " gracious " brings out the thought of sin and the need of pardon. There is here a full offer of salvation from a reconciled God. Not one of us need fear.

" The Lord lift up His countenance "—means encouragement, guidance, delight, sympathy, triumph.

" And give thee peace," the assurance that all is well.

HIS DEPOSIT AND MY DEPOSIT

I Timothy vi. 20. Psalm xxxi. 5.
" Keep that which is committed to thy trust."
II Timothy i. 12.
" He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him."

In the first text there are eight words in English, in the Greek there are but three. If they were translated literally, it would be—" Guard the deposit." We are most familiar with the phrase in connection with banking. The money you put in, you call a deposit. In these two texts we have two deposits. Christ deposits something with me, which I have to keep for Him, and I deposit something with Him, which He is to keep for me.

We can easily see that we have here two of the biggest of all subjects. Together they include, one way or another, everything that I have and everything that Christ has, all my past, my present, my future ; and all Christ's past, present and future. They are as big, as boundless as eternity, they fill all thought and transcend all imagination.

What is it that Christ has deposited with us ? Who could possibly unfold or describe all that a man has—all that he gets—from God ? First,

there is his life. He is fearfully and wonderfully made. There is much in this that we share with the brutes, but that does not make God's kindness to us the less—but His kindness to them all the greater. Look at a little bird. You see it springing from the egg, with intelligence suited to its need, able to fly, to seek its food, to build its nest. You see generation after generation preserved. Not one of them is forgotten before God. The gift of life is not less wonderful that it is so common. The commonest gift of God is worthy of God. It is no dishonour to say there is so much we have in common with the beasts—"Lord, Thou preservest man and beast. How precious is Thy grace!" Think of all the infinitude of power and forethought displayed in life. In these last days we see how full of power matter is—light even in darkness—a road through the pathless air. What a rich variety there is in life! Think of our living, palpitating, quivering flesh—the bone, the muscle, the nerve-life!—a great gift of God. And we must keep and guard it by purity, by exercise and sobriety. If God has guarded my life for 6,000 years, preserving it in channels past reckoning, is it not worth guarding?

And not only life, but all that constitutes my personal life—my being, my history—all that makes me *me*. Here is a wide view of the love of God. "By the grace of God I am what I am."

Pilgrim Cheer

Let us look at a few things comprehended in this. Many of you will recollect the rhymes, which in our childhood we thought very clever, which we scribbled on our school books. "So-and-so is my name—Scotland is my nation, etc." There is far more in these jingles than we imagine. The child has there its birthright in its hand, if it only knew it. It is in heavenly places, close by the oracle of God, in the secret place of the Almighty. There is the priceless gift of self-consciousness, the sense of identity, of responsibility, of rights, of privileges.

Then we have the preparation God has given for all this. There is my name. A name is a deposit. It means the history, the character, the life, the works, the death, the prayers, the honour of all that ever belonged to my people before me for centuries. We see this in the Genealogy of our Lord. There's a great deposit in our names and history. Conversation, enquiry, are the keys for getting hold of that deposit.

Then there is our national character. The word "Bannockburn" means that a nation has fought for me. The boy on the street claims to be the representative of Bruce and Wallace and all the nameless heroes that fought in that and in a hundred other fights. No Spaniard but demands and gets a certain respect from the career of the great Columbus. We claim to think much of the

Covenanters. They fought for a deposit—of liberty, civil and religious, and for the glory of the Redeemer.

That brings one to the great deposit. We are all the heirs of all the ages, inheriting a name, a fame, a work, an opportunity—the glory of the Gospel—of work for Christ. I must guard this deposit. I must not let it be taken from me. I must use it. God demands His Own with usury. I can't keep it unless I use it, and by every fact I know, every promise, every faculty, every ounce of strength, every opportunity, every noble thought, I must live worthily of it.

What have I committed to God? My trust in His mercy. If I cannot open the gates I fling Him the keys. I plead with Him to do anything but cast me off.

I put into His keeping the concerns of my life, my future to arrange. He forbids me to take anxious thought for the morrow.

I give Him my past to blot out.

I leave with Him all the results—the fruit of my work. I cast the seed into the ground and wait for His sunshine, His shower.

I commit to Him my prayers, my tears and hopes for others, my need of help and guidance in unforeseen emergencies; and having put myself under Him, I am ready for all that He may put under me.

THE LESSON OF LOT

GENESIS XVIII. 17. PSALM IV. 7.
"Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?"

THE land belonged to Abraham, and when God would destroy a part of it He will tell him why. God has a property in us, and yet He is our partner, and a partner Who consults with us and tells us all He does.

"And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom." Sodom was meant to be a lesson for all time. Abraham was to teach his children. There are few more trying questions than this—How much to tell young people of certain sins. Parents make a great mistake in telling them nothing. There are many things that are not pleasant to speak of, but we think of them, and the world speaks of them. Parents ought to take their children apart, and, in the fear and love of God, tell them at the right time all they ought to know.

The Dead Sea was visible from all the high land of Judæa. Parents could not help telling their children that there were cities sunk there because of sins of the flesh.

The Lesson of Lot

The angels came to try Lot as well as Sodom. He sat in the gate. It might be partly business, partly pleasure, partly duty that took him there. It was the chief place of commerce. It was where a man in difficulty would come to get the best advice. It was where anyone who wanted to do good, to help someone in distress, to entertain strangers, would go. So God comes to us in the ordinary line of duty. We can't know whether the angels really wished to stay in the streets all night. Christ Himself made as though He would go further. But Lot will take no denial. You see in his hospitality the result of Abraham's training. He washed their feet. He baked unleavened bread. That little circumstance shows the man. A woman can show, and does show, whether she has grace or not just by the kind of food she prepares. It is a great part of a woman's life, just as a man's daily work is the chief part of his life. She may show whether she has God with her or not. It is not credible that God will make her spend the best part of her life on work that He cannot be glorified in. When a boy has forgotten his minister's sermons, and most of his father's prayers, he will remember his mother's baking.

How was it that Lot was found in Sodom? Clearly from love of money, love of the world. He was a godly, but a selfish, grasping man, who

tremendous experience to have to keep silence about! Now their tongues were loosed and their mind's eye opened and they were free to speak, and doubtless did speak that night. I think it would be worth while to have heard Peter describe Moses and Elias. And Thomas was not there! Many other experiences had enlarged their minds.

Further, they were men with great futures. Extraordinary careers lay before them—heroes, martyrs, men who were to consort with angels, men who were to turn the world upside down, men entrusted with the carrying out of God's eternal purpose. They were intensely lovable men, men who could get on well with others. They had been companions in tribulation, and nothing binds men with such a feeling of comradeship as the facing of great trials. They had mutually encouraged each other to believe in Christ.

Christ was there—Teacher, Master, Friend, the Altogether Lovely. But He was there in a new capacity—the most wonderful Companion, the happiest, the tenderest, the most diligent. He was now the Lamb of God that had taken away the sin of the world, had conquered death and hell and the devil, had opened the Kingdom of God to all believers. What a change in Him! Three days before, well-nigh overwhelmed with fear, the devil attacking Him on every side, anxious,

weary, heavy-laden, praying with great drops of sweat. Now all the weaknesses associated with His sinless human nature are gone for ever. Such a talk of finished work, accomplished victory, of glory begun, universal dominion, and the Throne of God established for ever and ever—and Thomas was not there to hear!

May I say that Christ was even tenderer than ever? He had been cruelly wronged. He had already had an interview with Peter, and Thomas missed the profoundest evidence that sin can be forgiven. The man who forsakes the House of God may say he is looking at Creation and Providence, and I daresay he may be. I hope he is—but I affirm he is not thinking about redemption and forgiveness, he is forsaking the very place where he may hear about these in fullest perfection.

The attendance at that House of Prayer was written down, the name of the absent one marked, and the whole world knows it. There were many companies of people in Jerusalem, and whether Thomas thought himself a marked man or not he was observed. He had gone out and in with Christ, and no man could do that without bearing the mark of Christ in some way. There can have been few men more unhappy than he. He had almost abandoned hope, and he was not a man to disguise his countenance. Some men might hide emotion, but not this man.

Pilgrim Cheer

God was there. It was the first Christian Sabbath, the beginning of that long line of Sabbaths that are to bring honour to His Son through all time.

THE LAW OF LOVE

DEUT. XXIV. 10–11. PSALM CXII. 5.

" When thou dost lend thy brother any thing, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge."

LOVE is the fulfilling of the law. The scribes were greatly puzzled as to which was the most important Commandment. Scholars tell us they have counted all the laws in the Pentateuch and found that there were 248 affirmative and 1,365 negative ones. They have found further that the one about the fringes of the garments was looked upon as the weightiest. Christ gives them the principle that underlay all: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and thy neighbour as thyself. The second is like unto the first in its grandeur. It is not a solitary act to be observed now and again according to circumstances or by only one class of people. It is a grand principle—ever present, never to be forgotten, going on the same lines as the first—as well pleasing to God and receiving the very same reward.

It is a principle not for a day or a year, but for life; for rich and poor, for old and young, for time and eternity. Yes—" like unto it," and as joyfully obeyed by Christ as the others, one that

warms the heart and exalts the mind, one that could only be obeyed by the Grace of God given unto us. These two Commandments unite heaven and earth.

And in the Pentateuch God gives a great many instances to show how this love is to be fulfilled. First of all, we see the love of God in providing a law upon the subject at all. The question of property was undoubtedly in a different position in those days when the Jews entered the Land of Promise. There was no such thing as poverty. Every tribe got its own inheritance. They were all related by blood. Everyone had a fair chance, and poverty therefore would be the result, as a rule, either of idleness or thriftlessness. But such is the love of God, there are emergencies of life that law takes no notice of, but God provides for the sinner. Nay more—He sends poverty even upon His Own people, not only that they may learn the riches of His grace and power and wisdom, and see that there are better things than those of earth, but also to make them pity the poor.

We see the love of God and His gentleness in the matter of pledges. "No man shall take the nether or the upper millstone to pledge." It was needed every day. So also was the upper garment to be restored when the sun went down, for "that was a man's covering." In the East it

is often so cold through the night that one finds the water frozen in the morning, and by midday one is afraid to go out because of the great heat. And the wonderful principle here given is " that He may bless thee." There are some people, we say, whose good wishes are worth nothing, and their bad ones can do us no harm. Possibly their prayers taken by themselves bring no blessing, but the very fact that you have deserved *their* prayers makes you sure of Christ's. There is no man upon whom kindness will not have some effect. It may remind him of God's. He is lifted up for a little out of the mire and clay, and made to breathe a holier and happier air.

Now, is not this the way God treats us ? We are debtors to Him. The only thing due to us as wages is death. He has given us the loan of time, health, bodies, minds, souls. And many a time, as it were, God reminds us that we are in His power. During the day we forget and have no sense of His presence, but when night comes we have to lie down—the greatest sinner on earth has to commit himself to God's care in sleep. The mantle of darkness covers him. By the very kindness of that God to Whom we are in debt we forget the debt and rise once more with the opportunity of having the past forgotten. Just as the millstone was never to be taken away because it was the means of life, so in God we live

Good—because it is for a worthy object. The gladiators in the games fought simply for life. Two men brought face to face, who had never seen each other before, became enemies from that moment. In other circumstances they might have become friends, but now no love was possible. It was a fight to stave off death.

Is it not so with many amongst ourselves? What are they fighting for? Here is a rich man, determined to end as master of the property where as a boy he had served. Others are striving after pleasure. Some are fighting for the necessaries of life, trying to make ends meet, staving off ill-health. Paul's fight was for the glory of God and the salvation of the world. He was striving to make men better, to get every man to be a joint-heir with Christ, willing himself to be accursed if his countrymen might be saved, going where bonds and imprisonment awaited him. There is no selfishness there: "All these things move me not."

A "good fight," because it was well fought. It was one of the tragic things connected with these old combats that if the man fought well his life was spared, but if he showed cowardice, or in any way displeased the multitude, the signal for his death was given. Some refused to surrender, yielding only when dying. Others shirked the fight, seeking refuge in flight or appealing for

mercy. So, too, among ourselves there are some who fight hard, and all honour to them : a son struggling to support his parents ; a daughter paying her father's debts ; a man contending with ill-health or bad fortune, fighting for years with his back to the wall, staving off the inevitable day. On the other hand, are there not many of God's people who like cowards have to be driven back ? Some of us are trying to serve God a little : is it not because we find it best for ourselves ? What is our ideal future ? An old age of ease and comfort ? How unlike Paul the aged, claiming new conquests to the last, ready for new work !

A " good fight," because it was fought successfully. A man may do his very best in all other contests and be defeated. He strives to stave off death, but it comes at last and conquers him. His wealth, his honours, his name pass away — away to others. At the best he gains no more than did the hero of a combat, applauded for a few moments by twenty thousand spectators and absolutely forgotten in a day or two. But we see Paul already triumphing over death. We should have said that for him the worst was all to come. He speaks as if it were all over —the battle past. Had he failed in some things ? Yes, alas, failed to bring men to God, and there is no failure so disheartening as that. But we don't know. The issue we must leave to God.

have passed through the same sorrow—so song is not complete without parts. There is comradeship, hope, mastered tears, a certain joy and satisfaction already assured. Our Saviour went out to Gethsemane after He and His disciples had sung Psalms together.

We see in this text that singing was not only possible but appropriate. This was a great day in history; it was the end of an old story—of Jacob's return home after an exile of one-and-twenty years, with wives and children—a man becoming his own master. It was a new chapter in Providence, a new page in the story of Redemption, the beginning of marvels, reaching to the very end of time. It was the day before Jacob got his new name, when he wrestled with the Angel.

Let us note the songs here were *not* sung. It is a story of lost opportunities. That is one of the things we shall discover in Heaven: how much we have lost; the grand texts we never saw; the chapters we completely missed; the promises we never noticed; the good books we had no time to read; the prayers we never prayed; the songs we refused to sing and made it impossible for others to sing. You and I are like Laban; we have ourselves to thank.

But the songs we miss don't hinder the song of the Angels and Saints. Here was a stealthy,

sudden, silent flight—a little anxious caravan, 400 coming to meet Jacob with doubtful intent, but the Angels of God met him and Christ met him. There was joy in Heaven, and joy in Jacob's heart, for " He blessed him there."

JESUS' MOTHER GIVEN TO JOHN

JOHN XIX. 26. PSALM CXVI. 16.
" He saith unto His mother, ' Woman, behold thy son.' "

THIS was the crowning sorrow of Mary. She had marvelled all her days, had laid up things and pondered them in her heart. Simeon had fairly warned her: " A sword shall pierce thine own soul."

She knew, as none other did, that Christ was the Son of God. Though He grew up as a child, learning, yet there never had been sin in Him. She saw during those thirty years in Nazareth that there was evidently some high destiny before Him. When they had passed, she saw Him gather disciples and begin His ministry. Her hopes, her trust, her knowledge of Him were summed up in these words: " Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." He was a son to be obeyed. As those three years of ministry went on, His glory grew. He healed the sick, the deaf, the lame, the blind. He raised the dead. There was nothing He could not do. But things had taken a turn the mind could hardly conceive. Five days before, He had ridden in triumph into Jerusalem, and now she

sees Him actually on the cross! It had all come on so suddenly. Was it a dream? The son of God, the Holy One, hanged as a malefactor! What did it mean? Doubtless the hope would arise in her heart—He had raised the dead, He could save Himself now. The greatness of His power would be seen—He would, indeed, be King of Israel. But these awful words of His shattered her hopes. He is going to leave her. Another must care for her in the days to come. She must have another son! The worst had come to pass! And yet I think her greatness is never so conspicuous. In that awful hour of agony, lonely, disgraced, disappointed, heart-broken, she yet bows her head and yields and goes away without one murmuring word.

Oh! if ever there be a moment on earth when your greatest, lifelong hope is shattered, and your worst fear is realized, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."

Do we not see here the greatness of the mystery of godliness? She had watched Him, heard Him read the Bible and explain the types. She had seen a marvellous humility, unlike what any earthly king would show, she had been told again and again that He must die, yet she never grasped the truth. It is the same with you and me. We wonder at her blindness and at the apostles' blindness. We do not see our own. There is not

one word that is not to be taken for what it means. Will not that be one of the marvels of Heaven—to see that God meant all He said and that the man who claimed the promises is the man who got them?

See the honour paid to John. Whether it was Mary's boldness or not that brought him to the cross we do not know. But there he was, and he got Christ's dying command. He was the disciple whom Jesus loved, but he never could have anticipated that he was to take Christ's place. The honours Christ bestows are honours to be won. They are given to the man who is ready for them, to the man who is on the spot. We see, during the last week of Christ's life, every offer is accepted. The man that has the ass; the man that has the upper chamber; Joseph, Nicodemus, the women with sweet spices—those that are toiling and on the outlook get the blessing.

BEARING OUR BURDENS

NUMBERS VII. 9. PSALM LXVIII. 19.
" The service of the sanctuary belonged unto them (the sons of Kohath) ; they bare it upon their shoulders." (R.V.)

THIS is the second longest chapter in the Bible, the only one longer being the 119th Psalm. A more remarkable thing about it is that it is the chapter in the Bible with the greatest number of repetitions. The twelve princes gave certain gifts, each giving the same, that there should be no strife. If it was necessary to give their names, one word would have sufficed for their gifts—gave " likewise." But just as a bride loves to show her presents, and marks each one with the donor's name, so God goes over every article—never weary. Where one verse and " etc." would have done, God spends fifty-five absolutely needless verses, we should have said. But they were not needless, for the Lord had need of them and was well pleased. Just as the 119th Psalm speaks of God's Word and God's promises, so this chapter emphasizes the fact for ever that no gift, no prayer, no offering, is uninteresting to God.

The next most interesting fact in this chapter

is the delight in giving which those Israelites had. In the 34th chapter of Exodus we are told the workmen of the Tabernacle told Moses the people were bringing too much. Everything had been provided and the tabernacle fully set up. Those princes (v. 3) evidently, having got hold of God's Own Spirit, were determined to find something God had not. Apparently they had put their heads together privately—without consulting Moses. They had brought a little surprise. They were not asked; indeed, they had been forbidden. Moses wisely and joyfully laid the matter before God—rather God Himself took the first words "Take it of them." It had not been enjoined, but so true it is there is a way and a place for anything and everything love can do.

We read in Psalm LXVIII. 19. (R.V.), "God daily beareth our burdens." That is the history of the world. Every tool that the Spirit of God has taught man to make is a bearing of his burden. The cloud above him protects his head, waters his fields, fills his rivers, and they carry his merchandise. One might say that the great part of the history of this country is the invention of labour-saving appliances, which just means that God takes the burden off our shoulders. He has taught us to use coal and the coal gives steam and steam drives machinery. There are vast forces in the world which God is waiting for man

to find the use of. We see electricity being manacled, but look at the mighty winds not yet subdued. Consider the vast forces of the tides. There we have a million times more force wasted every day than the whole world needs. These white horses are like steeds on which we could ride, but we have not yet harnessed them.

God does not mean men to have nothing to do Everyone has got a burden which he must bear, but when you come to God, the burden falls from your own shoulders.

But look at the one great burden in the world, the burden of sin. Christ carried that. The Three-One-God began to carry that from before time was. The Kingdom of Heaven is nigh thee—even at the doors; but you must stretch out your hand and lay hold on it. There must be striving. It cannot be lightly done. You must take up your cross and follow Christ—not only in your own salvation but in the salvation of others. "God helped the Levites that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord."

labour. A lad has to go through a five years' or seven years' apprenticeship, but God was 50 or 100 years causing that tree to grow. A carpenter's is a trade a man should be proud of. It was Christ's trade. It is a trade a man can do good work at—one that deals with everybody and every concern in life. It should stir up all that is in a man, for God made the tree and man must treat it worthily. The best trade is one that gives full scope to all a man's powers.

What are you going to be? The finest sight in the world is that of a working man, looking like his work, proud of his work, refusing to do slipshod work, doing his work in the fear of God. And the man who carries that principle of honour and honest work into his life will carry honour and honesty all through. He may not lay past much to start with, but he builds a good foundation. There will be no hay or stubble or rubbish in his life—no need of discipline. His house, his money, his goods, his character, just like his salvation, will be founded upon a rock.

CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST

LUKE XVIII. 35. PSALM XLVI. 11.

"Nigh unto Jericho."

WE know from Isaiah LXIII. it was Christ who appeared to Joshua; it was the Angel of God's presence. Christ is our Mediator, the One Who comes between us and God. All created angels refuse to receive worship. "See thou do it not; I am thy fellow servant." This one received it. Other angels *see* God's face—behold His glory; this one *was* God's face—the direct manifestation of God. In the Old Testament God revealed Himself by Jesus Christ. He made the world by Him. He committed all judgment to Him. Christ undertook to reveal the Father. In what way we are to behold God in Eternity we cannot tell. He has no likeness—cannot be confined to space. It is a perplexing, and at first a vexing thought. It seems to remove Him so far from us. We cannot see the Holy Ghost, though He is a personality, yet the Mediator—one with God and one with us—will reveal Him, with no sense of absence or unintelligibility, but as present and lovable. We shall see Him—God manifest in flesh. When Christ appeared to

Joshua He had not a real body. The body He afterwards received was born of the Virgin Mary, and was as yet uncreated. The body He now has in Heaven is the body that was crucified and buried and raised from the dead. We cannot tell how that appearance of the Angel of the Covenant was assumed, but I have no doubt that as Ezekiel recognised the Glory of the Lord that stood by him on the Plain to be the same Glory that he had seen by the river Chebar, so, in Heaven, Joshua now looking at the body of Christ will see that it was the same Lord.

It was a turning-point in history, and it was meet He should appear to Joshua. All that happened was a preparation for Calvary, and just as in Eternity He said: "Here am I," in time, again and again, God says: "Lovest Thou Me?" and Christ in His infinite joy has to say: "Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." At the call of Abraham, at the destruction of Sodom, Christ, so to speak, is served here as Mediator to all that is to be. He is willing to do all that lies before Him. It was a revelation of the Lamb of God as well as God Himself.

And all that was part of His glory. He had already as Son been our Mediator. He had spent Eternity over our salvation. He had given the clearest, strongest proofs that He would do

the work of God. It was He Who threw down the walls of Jericho, He Who loved His people and was with them at all times, knowing them that are His. As Captain of the Lord's Host He had come.

" Nigh unto Jericho." Fourteen hundred years pass and we see the same Lord, but now in His humiliation. That first appearance was only a vision manifesting and yet veiling itself. Now, we know whence He is, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man. Then He came in majesty, now He comes in humiliation. For He is on His last journey to Jerusalem. For the third time He has proclaimed Himself as going to be crucified—to be cast off by God ; but He is doing all in love ; yes, going to face whatever He shrank from—yet hastening, going to endure the wrath of God, in such joy and such grief that the disciples watched His quickening step, His troubled face, and they followed in fear.

Who are they that welcome Him ? A blind beggar and his companion. There are three people connected with Jericho whose names we know—Rahab, Bartimeus, and Zaccheus. Yes, He stays in that town, but at whose house ? The house of one that was hated and despised. Yet, if He saves them all in spite of their sin, He saves them from their sin—the beggar who proclaims his faith and will not be denied ; the woman who believes

the foulest stain can be blotted out ; Zaccheus, to whom wealth was all and pride was everything, who climbs a tree and owns his sin and surrenders half his gains.

Christ was King of the Jews and it was fitting He should enter on His Kingdom a second time from Jericho. " As Captain of the Lord's host am I come."

ATONEMENT AND RESURRECTION

LEVITICUS XVI. PSALM XXXII. 1–2.

"The day of atonement."

THE greatness of this occasion is seen in the simplicity of the robes demanded on that day. We can't do without forms and customs, but whenever a form becomes a mere form, it is apt to lose its meaning. On other days the Israelites saw the High Priest in his glory. They might think that Aaron himself was something. On this day they must see that Aaron himself is a sinner. He stands conspicuously forth as such. He has to make atonement for himself, for the holy place and for the tent of meeting—the very things under his special care. They were all polluted. No flesh shall glory before God.

Now Christ was tried—till He was thirty years of age—not only learning what man endures, but tried, tempted to the uttermost by the insolence of men, by the malice of devils, by long delay and by the limiting of His power. He worked no miracle in those thirty years, but at the end of them came His Father's testimony: "This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."

DEATH A SOLEMN CERTAINTY

I KINGS XIII. 31. PSALM LVI. 13.

"When I am dead."

THE text brings before us the one certainty of life. About everything else we can only say: "If I'm spared;" "When I grow up;" "When I am rich;" "When I am old"—"if *God will.*" None of these things may happen, but it is appointed unto men once to die. There is no discharge in that warfare. It is a tremendous certainty to any man who thinks, whether he be a believer in Christ or no. Dr. Alexander Whyte's advice in one of his books is "to practise dying" —to live in constant thought of it. I wish you to take this text and ask yourselves how you would fill it up.

Some things we all must face. We shall see corruption, and that is very appalling. We can't speak of it –yet speak of it we must. There was only One who saw no corruption. He could not be holden of death, because He had never sinned. We must be buried—put out of sight, yet if we are Christ's the love of God follows us. What no eye can look at, what no imagination can

conceive, Christ sees and watches over, purifying it, numbering each particle till it becomes, as Halyburton said, " a pickle bonnie dust." When we are cast out of people's sight, we shall lie in Christ's arms.

And so the believer, as it were, still claims as his own even his very dust. He may give commandment concerning it. Jacob said, " Bury me with my fathers." Is there not something very affecting in that ? When earthly ties are loosened they are bound afresh again. If you wish to know a man's family you see it on a gravestone. When the other world is very near and real our own individual history stands out all the more sharply. Joseph, too, when dying, gave commandment concerning his bones, and that commandment became a prophecy—a guarantee. " I die ; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which He sware unto Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And ye shall carry up my bones from hence." We see the dead man's hand beckoning to that better land.

Don't say " It's all one to me what comes over me." I hope we have faith in God to order all things well, but I hope we would like our flesh and our bones to speak for Him. It is redeemed flesh and it has potentialities.

The man of science rejoices at the daily opening up of new worlds and would like to see the issue

of more experiments. The immortal part of the redeemed, made perfect in holiness, swift in comprehension, shall see their Lord face to face. Surely they shall know of the brave deeds being done on earth—nations serving Him, loving Him, our own land becoming a kingdom of God. They shall hear of these things—perhaps hear about all in whom they are interested.

But I must not only be seeing, but helping the joy of my Lord now. While I still live I must use every hour, praying God to make me wise to see opportunities of service and swift and willing to use them, unceasingly proclaiming Christ's love, giving all diligence to make my calling and election sure, so that an entrance shall be ministered to me abundantly into Christ's everlasting kingdom. David prepared abundantly for the building of the Temple "before his death." I am not dead and still there is time to work. And still I have time to be saved. If that is the most solemn of all certainties the most glorious is—I am still alive.

PETER REBUKING AND REBUKED

MARK VIII. 32. PSALM XL. 6–8.

"And Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him."

IT is difficult to say which rebuke is the more wonderful—Peter's rebuke of Christ or Christ's rebuke of Peter. It would be hard to point out a stranger incident in Holy Writ. Here we see the folly of man and the anger and love of Christ, and there are not wanting proofs—many proofs—that the events of that day never passed from the Apostle's memory. Mark was Peter's chosen companion, and the gospel that goes by the name of the one reflects the memory and the mind of the other. We all have had certain solemn moments in our lives, whether by reason of the excitement of the mind, or a sense of premonition given us by God to deepen the lessons He would have us learn; so we find Peter narrating incidents that happened on the day of his rebuke that the other Evangelists would seem to have forgotten.

It must have been a very bitter moment in which our Lord turned round, and before the other disciples used such words as He never used

to man before or after —words He used only one other time, and then to Satan himself. Yet Peter could not help remembering that it was from no ill-nature or passion He spoke, for Christ had never been more loving, more gentle. He had taken a blind man by the hand, had laid His hands upon the sightless eyes and restored their sight. I would have you notice a day of rebuke is often preceded by a day of love, and honour, and a day of high attainment is often followed by a day of sin. You will remember what Bunyan tells us in the Pilgrim's Progress. It was not the ascent of the Hill Difficulty that tried men : it was the going down. It was difficult going up, but dangerous going down. No experience is more common than that. If you were to ask a minister of the Gospel what time of the year is most trying to him, he would tell you it was after his people and himself had been at the Lord's Table. Then the devil seeks to have them that he may steal away the good seed that was sown, that he may dishearten the believer and bring ridicule on the cause of God. Peter had just made a glorious confession –so glorious that our Saviour had proclaimed him " the rock " –and the next moment He had to say, " Get thee behind Me, Satan." If there be any of you who have been making a good profession in the name of God—any of you taking upon you solemn vows – remember

your hardest moment is now, when perhaps you think the battle is over.

In Matthew's Gospel we see that Christ had spoken in very high terms to Peter, who had declared Jesus to be the Christ, but now that Christ tells them of the mystery of the Cross, of His suffering and death, Peter took hold of Him and said that must not be. Peter would let Him know He was mistaken and that he knew better what should happen. Now, we are apt to say Peter's sin was not one we in our day could commit, and all the time it is perhaps one committed most frequently. But how ? In the very way Peter himself did— by making out that Christ's death was unnecessary—that there was no need for His sufferings ; and we may do that much more sinfully than Peter did. Peter loved Christ —no doubt of that—loved Him as his own soul, and he could not understand why the world should not love Him, let alone the possibility of its rejecting Him. Remember Christ's sufferings were yet to come, and we should have said Peter was to be excused for denying the possibility of such things. Yet Christ rebuked him. May we not be worthy of much greater condemnation ? Day after day we read, Sabbath after Sabbath we hear, that Christ died for us, and instead of accepting His righteousness and saying, " My Lord and my God," many say, " Was it not a mistake ?

Surely it was unnecessary." And in doing so we sin against God's purposes of love. We savour not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.

ANGELS OUR SERVANTS

MATTHEW XVIII. 10. PSALM CIII. 20.

"Their angels."

THIS is not a passage about which there is any doubt. It does not occur in one of Paul's Epistles, in a verse hard to be understood; it is not the imagination of some poet untrammelled by a regard for facts; nor is it the loving, sentimental wish of a mother who has lost her little child. These are words uttered by our Lord Himself, in the presence of a little child, in one of those awful moments in which He spoke of heaven and hell. I would remind you further that Christ came to open up to us the invisible world and show us the love of God.

In the Old Testament, Angels' visits were frequent, but men were afraid of them, they thought the thing half a dream. Christ's coming has made it easier for the Angels to come. He opened the way. There is no doubt He opened heaven, and He has made it possible for the Holy Spirit to be revealed. He has, still more, manifested the Father. If men had little idea of what the Godhead was till Christ came, no wonder that they knew so little of the Angels.

Pilgrim Cheer

Christ's Own life shows us what Angels are. He laid aside His glory. He prevented them by His Own voluntary humiliation from coming, ten thousand strong, to help Him. He became like us—poor, weary, thirsty, hungry, but He never got away from the Angels. They sang at His birth, they ministered to Him after the forty days' hunger, one strengthened Him in His agony, two watched His dead body. God sent them at special times as He endowed Christ with power to work miracles—to show what Christ had given up.

But they also came to show us what man is, as well as what God is—man's powers, duty, love and glory.

And lest we should thrust from us all this comfort and consolation, Christ is always speaking of the Angels, of their interest in salvation, their work at death and at the resurrection, and at the day of judgment. It is surprising how often Angels are spoken of in the New Testament, and how much knowledge specially Christ Himself gives of them. And, as it were, to leave us without a shadow of doubt He uses the word "their." We say " our God," " our Father," " our fathers' God." *Our* Angels might seem presumptuous, but when we think how much confessedly belongs to a little child we don't wonder at the adjective " their."

Angels Our Servants

The love of Angels must be very great. They have their individual characters, their peculiar gifts and experiences, they have marvellous knowledge. An Angel watches a child, and carries reports to God. They have an awful interest in it: " Will it be saved? " " Will it be the means of saving others ? "

To an Angel a child is worth more than a world, infinitely precious. We speak of " their souls," " their eternal destiny," " their Father in heaven." Christ adds " their Angels."

GEHAZI'S SIN

II KINGS v. 26. PSALM XLIX. 6–7.
"Is it a time to receive money, etc.?"

No chapter could begin more beautifully or end more disastrously. It bids fair, the longer we read, to be a story of God's love, and ends by being a record of God's wrath. It is like everything God does—all very good, and then man comes in and does his best to spoil it.

We look at Gehazi's sin and we see the tendency of sin to multiply on every side. You can't stop at one sin—it must have others along with it. Just as in grace the child of God has an infinite inheritance—there is no march line between the different graces, no boundary wall to His Kingdom. You can't have grace without having more grace. Cultivate any one grace and you shall, before you are aware, find that that grace has gained other ten graces. For instance, one cannot simply be a man of prayer, it must end in action of some kind or other. We must not say "My work ends here." "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." We are led on by the Spirit of all grace from

strength to strength. And so with sin. The devil brings seven worse spirits, and after a little they are legion. Not that we are necessarily led into many open sins, but there is a gradual giving up of territory. We are not defeated in pitched battles, but we retreat and retreat, surrendering more and more, till at last we find ourselves wholly given over to Satan. Gehazi committed a great many sins—the sin of covetousness, the sin of blasphemy in taking the name of God in vain, the sin of downright falsehood in what he said to Naaman and what he doubtless was forced to say to the two servants, and the falsehood he told Elisha the man of God.

But notice specially that Elisha does not dwell on these falsehoods, nor on Gehazi's covetousness, nor his bold effrontery, but he goes to the very root of the matter and shows Gehazi that his whole feelings towards God and man were wrong—his whole idea of the circumstances of the time was at fault. The covetousness and falsehoods were bad enough, but they were nothing compared to the utter want of comprehension of the solemnity of the time. Supposing even that he could have got the money and garments honourably, it would have been disgraceful to take them.

There may be a greater sin in want of feeling than in a positive act of wickedness. A man says, " Show me what I have done wrong ; point out

a single sin or digraceful action." But God says He claims our thoughts, our minds, our heart. The greatest sin of all is a want of entering into the divine fellowship. It is the sin of the prodigal's elder brother who could say, " I've done my duty. Show me anything I've done that was wrong." We see it in life. We see two children in different families. The one is at times wilful, disobedient ; it vexes its parents, takes its own way, but it comes back, sorry for what it has done. It really loves its father and mother. The other child is perfectly obedient, faultily faultless ; never a cross word ; there is perfect respect, but there is no love. A model child it may be, yet it is worse than the other.

So it is with many of us. No one could find fault with us. We don't drink ; we don't swear ; we don't steal ; we never transgressed any commandment ; and we say, " What do you want ? " And God says, " I want heart, love, affection—something more than obedience. I want the enthusiasm that results from feeling yourselves one with Me." Love is the greatest thing ; it abideth ever ; and that was what Gehazi had not.

What was it a time for ? It was a time to bless God. There can be little doubt the whole story would be told in Israel about the little maiden—that her word could bring two kingdoms together.

But it was perhaps the most singular answer to prayer that had been known up to that moment in all history. There had not been such faith in all Israel. That she could wish well to her master who had taken her from her home—and captivity is specially terrible to a little child—and so had spoiled her life; that contrary to the conceit and faithlessness of her countrymen she should imagine God would be kind to a heathen and a Syrian: that was wonderful. But here was greater faith still. There were many lepers in Israel and to none of them was Elisha sent—she could have told that the prophet had raised the dead, she could not say he could heal the leper; and yet she committed God to this, pledged His honour, staked His reputation on a *new* thing. Was not that a trying time, think you, when the few words she spoke were taken up in earnest, and Naaman and all his company and chariots went off to see the prophet of the Lord? What if he couldn't cleanse Naaman—or wouldn't? There would be shame for her, war between the two countries, and dishonour to Israel's God. But God did not put her to shame. It was a new experience, a little child controlling the Almighty, something to make one forget this world altogether, and yet Gehazi can only say, "As the Lord liveth, I will take something of this Syrian."

It was a time to exalt God. The priests that

were attached to idols could not love their idols, but they loved the money their idols brought them. Naaman all his days had been accustomed to pay heavily to his god. But herein is the glory of *our* God—His name is love, His actions are sovereign free grace ; and now, after the prophet, by refusing money and by sending Naaman simply to wash in Jordan, had done all he could do to prove that God was a good God, Gehazi comes in and spoils all. Naaman, or at least all his retinue, would think that after professing to take nothing Elisha had changed his mind and was just like the rest of priests all the world over.

God gave up His Son to save sinners. Do we try to exalt Him before men ? Rather do we not determine not to give up some obstinacy or temper or personal advantage ? As the Lord liveth, we will not yield ! Christ's death is nothing to us. We come and go and our leprosy is ever increasing. We have not yet learned what be the very first principles of the love of God.

PRAYING ALWAYS

I PETER III. 7. PSALM V. 3.
"That your prayers be not hindered."

WHAT are the things that hinder prayer? Want of faith, want of perseverance, forgetfulness, formality, want of large expectations, the hiding of a besetting sin.

The word translated "hindered" is a tremendously strong one. "Cut off." The tree is "cut down," the right hand is "cut off." It means not only that prayer is impeded but that it has been made impossible. You simply *can't* pray. It has as completely gone from you as a limb cut off.

If we had been pleading with husband and wife to agree, we should have said, "For your own comfort; for the sake of the children; for the sake of example; to keep neighbours from talking;" but Peter says, "You can't pray together if you don't love one another."

Prayer is the highest exercise of the mind, the deepest enjoyment of the soul. It is a key that unlocks the door of Heaven. It is the first sign of the Holy Spirit's working. He teaches us to pray. Throughout Eternity, we shall bless Him

for that. It brings God and man together. It is the way to enter into the Divine fulness. So wonderful is it that the Son of God spent nights in prayer, better to Him than food, better to Him than sleep. It is such a glorious thing that you can't imagine anyone losing a chance of sharing it with another.

A husband and wife (and Peter was a married man) might be defined as two people who can pray together. Ordinary friends may go together a certain distance. Some you leave at the foot of the mount. Some you take within a stone's cast ; but husband and wife should go hand in hand through the veil together, having no secret one from the other and no sorrow they cannot share. Each of them has special trials, and in bearing one another's burden we are helped to bear our own. What petition one forgets the other may remember, and their prayer rises to God with united force. There is a double outpouring of the Spirit. It is different from public prayer because individual cases may be prayed for.

And in prayer they comfort one another. They bring promises to recollection. They share one another's joy. They share the joy of God, knowing and loving one that shall live with Him for ever and ever.

The hours of prayer are the grandest hours in life.

A MAN IN CHRIST

II Cor. xii. 2. Psalm xci. 1.

"I knew a man in Christ."

There was a famous Christian Father called Ignatius, who laboured at Antioch towards the end of the 1st century, and he was so gentle and lovable that the story arose that he was the child whom Christ took in His arms. It is said that in his old age he was brought before the Emperor Trajan, and Trajan asked him if it was true that Christ was in him —Christ who had been crucified in Judæa 70 years ago! And when Ignatius persisted that it was true, the Emperor bade him be taken to Rome and given to the lions for the people's amusement. Few emperors were as good as Trajan. People used as a proverb the words, Melior Trajano: felicior Augusto; that is, better than Trajan: happier than Augustus. Yet to him Ignatius' saying was not only incomprehensible, but terrible. The people who claimed to be in Christ and to have Christ in them must be worse than madmen. He listened with a dread awe such as Pilate felt when he said, "Art thou a King then?" The very words of Ignatius were

maddening –stirring to fury the devil that was in men. For the name of Christ is set for the rising and falling of men. It is the name above every name –or the name of offence.

I wonder how many of us have this feeling of fear that brings a sinking of heart, a hatred, a loathing ; a feeling such as the devils had when they said " What have I to do with Thee ? " a feeling that Christ is thrust upon us, that He has actually come to *torment* us. Oh strange view of the Lamb of God! Let me say to such that to be in Christ means exactly the very opposite of what you think it means –your whole ideas of it are utterly wrong. Some think, perhaps, that it is a kind of cant phrase that means nothing ; just a form of words that some utter in excitement—that others have got by rote.

Yes, they are words, and like all other words you may treat them simply as words, but if ever words meant a reality, these do. You who are young have this difficulty– you do really believe them to be true and you tremble. They fill you with annoyance. You can't get rid of them. The name of Christ sums up all that you like least in your daily life. It carries you unwillingly to heavenly places—to the regions of spiritual privilege ; it is associated with prayer and reading the Bible, and family worship and the Lord's Day, and especially is it bound up with the

weariness of a Communion season. It means all you don't like. There are things you like—your food, your games, a holiday, a merry song, an interesting book. There are things you don't like quite so well—school, lessons, hard work. Yet, irksome as these things are, there is not one of them you would not prefer to anything that had to do with Christ.

"I joyed when, To the house of God go up, they said to me"—seems the most unreal, fantastic utterance you ever heard. It means restraint—torment. You are wrong there.

It means something you can't be troubled with—that you will thrust away from you. Once more, you are wrong there. For it is the one subject that God will compel you to think of. It is the one thing He thinks of and that guides all His actions.

Then you say, It is something I don't understand. You are right there. Something you have misunderstood. You must know a man in Christ, and that man must be yourself before you can possibly know what Paul means. It is a mystery you can't understand – a mystery I cannot explain; it is a knowledge worth all your other knowledge put together; it is the only thing in the world worth knowing, and it is a knowledge Christ will give you if you ask Him. Just as the woman of Samaria prayed without knowing what she meant,

Pilgrim Cheer

"Give me this water to drink," so ask Christ for this knowledge, tell Him you wish to know a man in Christ.

Even to those who are in Christ there is a great mystery in the union of Christ and His members. It is not a union that passes away as a cloud melts into the azure. "I knew a man in Christ fourteen years ago." Our names, our personalities, our characteristics, our histories, are all preserved. It is a union from everlasting: "He hath chosen us in Him from before the foundation of the world." What a mystery that is! God saw us in Christ from eternity, loved us with an everlasting love, rejoiced in the sons of men. It is a union of the worthy and unworthy, a union that sprang out of sovereign grace and infinite love and mercy, a union that fills us with overwhelming joy and yet with overwhelming humility—"A man in Christ!"

THE SLEEP OF DEATH

I Cor. xv. 50. Psalm xxxix. 4.

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

We have two things here: first—Some of us shall sleep; second—Some of us shall be changed. The Apostle did not mean that some of these Corinthians might be living at the end of the world. He says "we," just because there is a certain unity in the human race.

We shall, some of us, sleep. That means *all* of *us*. We shall die, buried it may be in earth or in the sea. There is an appointed time for all of us and an appointed way. It becomes a solemn matter to us that we are every day, it may be, passing the place where we are to die, and as Moses and Elias spoke to Christ of Jerusalem, where His decease was to be accomplished, so Angels, and perhaps others, speak of the place where we shall pass. We are on holy ground. Just as we would not wish to have an unholy thought while standing on our father's or mother's grave, so let us never be without God *anywhere*, lest we be without Him in some place that shall have a momentous history for us at the last.

Pilgrim Cheer

Most of us have had reason to wonder why God directed our way to some place or other. However little you may think of it, the town whose name you pause at for a moment as you read the newspapers, the ocean whose vast extent amazes you as you gaze on it in a map –that may be your resting place.

Nor can you tell the manner of your death. "What is that to thee?" Never treat heartlessly any human frailty. Never count it odious to help some sufferer, never shrink from the strain of it: that may be the trouble you yourself shall have. In life we reap as we sowed. That member that we sinned in—that is the one we suffer in. The road we tread in transgression, we have to come back in by repentance.

I think, too, the certainty of death might well make each one of us gentler. Few though we are there is always someone of us nearing the river, someone approaching the beginning of the end, someone with us for the last time. We would not refuse to say a cheering word to one who was setting out for a far country. We would not think of despising any kind wish.

I would remind you that the soul does not sleep at death. We immediately pass into glory: not the full glory that shall be hereafter, but all the same, real glory. The Roman Church affirms that we need cleansing fires after death.

The Sleep of Death

We hold that the deliverance from the power and love of sin is complete at death.

The change that is to take place is, one might say, an infinite one. No pain, no suffering, could accomplish it. Like every other step in redemption it is the unspeakably glorious manifestation of the power and love of God. Sometimes God's people are taken away suddenly. We look back on the morning on which we parted from them. There was no premonition, nothing unusual, and yet none the less it may have been a few moments dealing with us that passes our imagination. Sometimes we see the results of this work of sanctification, but the process is to be revealed. That will form one of the glorious tasks of the redeemed—understanding, declaring to others hereafter, the way God had led them.

The souls of believers enter into an ever-increasing but yet an incomplete glory. How the body and soul are to be united, we do not know. That is hidden in the Divine wisdom. Yet it opens up a glorious view of the almighty power of God. Already there have been 6,000 years of Saints. How dear this world must be to Him. Soul and body are each to meet again, but oh, how different! A body without spot, a soul without sin.

THEY NEED NOT DEPART

MALACHI II. 16. PSALM CIII. 8.
"I hate putting away, saith the Lord" (R.V.)

THIS is a simple but a very weighty sentence—weighty in the form of expression, weighty as an argument, weighty in the time of its utterance.

The word hate is a strong word—strong when God uses it; but we use it so lightly—simply as describing dislike—that when God uses it it has no force. If we were wise we would let the Bible determine the use of a word. When we read this verse it seems a weak form of expression, and yet God could use no stronger. You who are parents can't do a better turn for your children than teach them to use words guardedly and wisely. Use your words, as you would use your time, your money, in God's fear. There is no possession more precious. There are treasures in store for the man who uses words rightly. A fine phrase is worth more than hid treasure.

When God wishes to describe His attitude to His Own Son He says—"My beloved Son";

and His attitude to us—" He loved the world." And the strongest thing He can say against evil is—" Which thing I hate."

The text has reference to a broken marriage tie. Tennyson's description of the highest form of wedded life is " To love one woman and to cleave to her." God would like all young people to make a wise choice of a lover—a choice for time and eternity, and He wishes young people to treat that faculty of winning a person's love as the most precious thing on earth—not a mere amusement for a month, or a year. The whole of what precedes marriage is a solemn time.

The marriage tie itself is such a wonderful thing that it is the nearest on earth to the love that Christ has for the saint. It is such a wonderful thing that Christ first manifested His glory at a wedding. God looks at the marriage tie—the high hopes, the perfect trust, the self-surrender, and it vexes Him to see that tie broken.

But instead of limiting Himself to that alone, He states it as a general principle. He hates it as a general principle. He hates all putting away—even a dying sparrow, a flower of the field, a gourd. How much more the greatest of all things! The worse a man is, the more God does for him. *How shall I give thee up?*

The words " I hate putting away " have tremendous force from the fact that God uses them

at the close of the Old Testament—His first call to the world and His last for several hundreds of years. The New Testament closes with an invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

PETER'S CONCERN FOR JOHN

JOHN XXI. 21. PSALM LXXI. 16–18.

"Lord, and what shall this man do?"

THIS was a question prompted by a very beautiful affection. For these two men were what in a certain sense we should call rivals—rivals for the highest post on earth—men both of them high-tempered and naturally ambitious, men who a few days before had forgotten even their Master's weariness in their strife about their personal dignity. A life-long habit of that sort is not easily overthrown. It had called forth many a warning, many a rebuke. The two men had, so to speak, been running neck and neck all along, and if John outran Peter when a long distance was in question, Peter could dash in before him at an unexpected moment. Peter had fallen, but he had seen the Lord, had been honoured, had seen the veil of the future drawn aside. He might have asked to hear more about himself, but he forgot himself and wished John brought forward. It is a marvellous instance of the miracles wrought by grace, a signal example of brotherly affection where once there had been undisguised jealousy.

Why does the Lord of love Himself apparently so much object to what was one of the beautiful fruits of love? He was evidently displeased. We must remember that if His words came as a rebuke they were not only softened by the tender look on His face and the kindly tones of His voice, but by the sweet grace of the command, "Follow Me." There was no harshness, no soreness left by the rebuke, but a very healing balm.

Christ revealed what a man's highest glory is. To know the future, to foresee events, to foretell what will happen—men regard as the greatest divine gift, but Christ here shows that a simple following of Him, simple obedience, is a far grander thing. As if Christ would say, "If a man follows Me, that is the grandest honour and knowledge." John had a glorious past. What had he done? Why, he was one of the first to leave all and follow Christ, and to recognize Him as the Lamb of God. He was with Christ in His temptations, on the Mount of Transfiguration and in Gethsemane. He had followed Him to the Prætorium and the cross. He had taken Christ's mother to his own home. He had come to the grave. He had stood by Peter after his denial. He had been true when all others were false. There was no need to ask what that man would do. His past was a sufficient guarantee. "What will this man

do ? " Why, don't you know what he *is* ? what he has been ? If you wish to know your future, look at your past. If you wish to know your future, *make* your future.

We now can in some measure answer the question " What will this man do ? " John's sun has gone on shining more and more. Look at his Epistles, his book of Revelation, his long and honoured life. Above all, look at his Gospel -- the woman of Samaria, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the 14th, the 17th and this last chapter. Why, we may say, in reverence, of John what John said of Christ, " The world would not hold the books that should have been written." Peter thought only of the last moment of life—of John's death. Christ thought and spoke of " a great while to come."

NEARING THE SHORE

ACTS XXVII. 27. PSALM CVII. 29–31.

"About midnight the shipmen deemed that they were drawing near to some country."

WE speak of the pathless sea, yet the bird finds its way over it. There are great roads marked out by that God Who made the birds—indications too subtle for us to see. I imagine, however, most seamen can tell in some way that land is drawing near. God does not leave them without witness if they will take heed. For fourteen days their waterlogged ship had been drifting along the Mediterranean. The storm was past its worst, but still the waves ran high, the wind roared and whistled through such cordage as remained. Then all at once there came a different sound—the sound of breakers. The captain of a vessel above all things loves sea-room, and yet to seamen in such a plight as is here spoken of, sea-room meant only the certainty of foundering. What they did wish for was land, and yet the land brought a new anxiety. It might only mean an earlier termination of their lives as well as of their voyage.

I don't think I am using this text in a wrong

way if I say it seems to be a parable of what happens in life. God at times sends us premonitions that something is going to happen. Indeed one feels that things can't go on as they are. We have a strange, uneasy feeling. We say—sometimes, at least, truthfully—" I have felt all day that something was going to happen " ; or, " I awoke through the night and felt I must get up to pray." We try to shake it off, and we can't. Or again, we feel in a joyous mood—why, we cannot tell, but we say, " I'm going to get good news." And this is just what we might expect. If bad news is coming God wishes to break it. He, as it were, feels so much for us that He can't smile as He is wont to do. On the other hand, if Angels of God are hovering around us—bright, rejoicing —it seems impossible that they cannot influence us by rays of light the eye cannot see but that may touch the soul.

A vague spiritual fear haunts all bad men. God seeks to save them. They deem they draw nigh some country. Health gives way—presence of mind, trust in themselves. Their suspicions are aroused. Their speech and their movements betray them.

It is also true of the love of God that there may be a time of great joy and faith, a sense of growing rapidly—of giving diligence. The countenance of God smiles on us.

Pilgrim Cheer

The text is a parable of what happens at the approach of death. We hear Time's breakers on that coast men call Eternity. We have all a life of our own. No one knows it. We go about our different work, but try as we may there are some things we cannot forget. They come in various ways. Grey hairs, a failure of memory, weariness of limb.

> "The gathering mist has dimmed our eyes,
> And with our hollowed palm we help our ear.
> And trace with trembling hand our wrinkled
> names."

Above all, there is the fear of the wrath to come—Ah, what sort of coast is it to be? What an awful moment that will be when a man says, "Let me know the worst, I can't bear this any longer"—to waken and see destruction!

But how glorious to deem one is drawing near home, the haven where we desired to be; to wish for the day, and yet have a glorious night; to come in to land—not on broken pieces of the ship, but laden with glory and honour, to meet old comrades and new friends, and above all to see our Redeemer standing by the shore.

CHRIST WRITING ON THE GROUND

JOHN VIII. 8. PSALM LXXXV. 8.
"And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground."

YOU will not imagine that it is proper to guess, far less possible to know, what our Saviour wrote. It is a wonderful proof of the honour God has put on us that His words have been written down not by His own hand but by the hand of man. Three times in history have men gazed on words written by the very finger of God—the case before us, the hand-writing on the wall at Belshazzar's feast, and the Ten Commandments. The first tables of stone, with the first words, were dashed to the ground. The second words, written on the wall, were lost; perhaps they perished that night in the ruins of Belshazzar's palace. Now for the last time the hand of God—God manifest in the flesh—writes in the language of men. Would we not have expected the multitude to guard that spot and preserve those words? And yet after all, the words were not lost. The eye of God saw them, the angels saw them, the heart of Christ retained them. They

have not perished. If they are not recorded in God's Book or discovered to us by God's Spirit and our own reflection they shall be revealed at last. No wise thought, no holy thought ever perishes. It becomes part of the inheritance of the people of God, it is laid up by Christ, it shall be known in Eternity.

I think, also, we should be thankful the words were trodden out of existence. It is a wonderful thing there are no relics of our Saviour. His very grave is unknown. Though He was a carpenter till thirty years of age and His work was good and faithful, such as men would treasure, there remains not one article, and we should be glad. We have His living presence. We have His words recorded. Suppose there had been some relic, what pride to those who had seen it, how little satisfaction, how much discontent to those who never saw it! What advantages the rich would have over the poor! Just as we find some suppose advantages belong to pilgrimages, that none can make but the wealthy. We should bless God that no man can say, "Lo here!" or "Lo there!" There is no place in the world where God refuses to be gracious –"The Word of God is nigh thee, even in thy heart." "I stand at the door and knock." When we lie down, our very pillow is the house of God, the gate of Heaven.

But the passage tells us a great deal more of the holiness and love of God. Our Saviour's action expressed not as with us indifference, but thought, and His thoughts were pity, anger, and love. One cannot imagine a more revolting story of the wickedness of the Pharisees. For generations the penalty of death had not been enforced. Especially under the Roman Government it was not lawful for them to put any man or woman to death. And further, they themselves at that time were notorious for the ungodliness of their lives. And in addition to the catching nature of their question and the inconsistency of their own conduct, there was an awful depravity in making use of such a sin. It was a sin the less said about the better. In the East a woman was never exposed to public gaze. It was a shame for her to be unveiled. Now they would drag her out and make her a spectacle in the most painful circumstances. We see Christ's purity and His love. He did not want to hear about her sin. You remember what happened in the case of the Prodigal's brother? The father says nothing at all about the sin. The elder hard-hearted brother will enter into all the particulars. There is not one of us who cares to speak about the sin of anyone we like. We don't write letters about it. We don't hurry off to be the first to

tell it. And if another begins to tell us we don't want to know. Our Saviour was too vexed. It was the close of the Feast of Tabernacles. He had spent the night on the Mount of Olives. He came early to the Temple to answer honest questions, to help those who were in trouble, to tell of the love of God– and this was what met Him! I ask you to examine yourselves as to the way you hear of sin. Is there anyone here who likes to read stories of human wickedness? Is that the most interesting part of the newspaper to you? I tell you then, you are very unlike Christ. That is one way we all have sinned. We have not "stooped down." We have heard of someone going far astray, and we were anxious to hear all and get a good look at that person. No one has a right to look at sin from curiosity. No eye but the eye of pity and compassion should fall on the sinner.

No, not even on these Pharisees, the worst of men, did Christ look. He was silent with sorrow. One would have imagined Him looking at them as one who knew their secrets, men who in such a moment of shame still remembered their pride, and went out in order of precedence. But He did not look.

Yes, He did look when all were gone. The woman's silence, her standing there, were accepted

as tokens of her sorrow. He freely forgave her. "Go, and sin no more."

Whatever cruel eyes have looked on you, whatever eye has turned away, when you are alone, O sinner, Christ looks at you.

NAOMI'S RETURN HOME

RUTH I. 22. PSALM XXX. 10–12.

"I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty."

NAOMI must have been between forty and fifty years of age—a time in life when hopes are either kindled afresh or laid aside and buried for ever. Ten dark and solemn years had been passed in Moab. Even their daily bread would be made bitter by the thought that they had got it in their own way and not in God's. But to Naomi there came the crowning sorrow of all—that her sons had married women of an accursed race. Her grandchildren might be heathen, or have the temper and tastes of heathen, strange upcroppings of an alien soil. She had made nothing by choosing her own way. Death, whose very shadow afar off she had fled from, had come on her in reality. She was left alone, hopeless and homeless. She had heard God had visited His people and she felt she was not of the number. Yet she heard the glad sound. She had doubted God, but she would return. There was more than bread in her Father's house—there was forgiveness. She had evidently been happy with her daughters-in-law. Now they will accompany her part of the way back.

She remembers all their kindness to herself personally and to the dead. She wishes them a happy life and although apparently one of them at least was still a heathen Naomi speaks a word for God.

One can see that Naomi was a good wife. Her description of what a husband is is one that should touch all women. " The Lord grant that ye may find rest each of you in the house of her husband." A woman has gifts from God that cannot be used till she has a home of her own. Married life seems strangely termed when you call it a " rest." Yet such it is in the fear of God. Trouble, ill-health and worry may come. Yet the wife draws more and more to her husband, and if they both love God they rest together in His arms.

The story is as interesting as the departure of Christian for the Celestial City. Will they go ? or will they not ? It looks at first as if Naomi did not wish them. Perhaps she did not. She knew how Moabites were looked on in her country. Even in Bethlehem there were men and women that could slander and let people go astray. What good could come out of Moab ? Orpah returned to her gods with a bitter cry—but Ruth clave unto Naomi. " Entreat me not to leave thee." It was Naomi's personal character and that of her " people " that drew Ruth. Naomi

must have told the story of Rachel, Leah, and Rebekah.

So they came to Bethlehem. How well she could remember every turn of the road, the well, the way she had gone with Elimelech. But ten years had made a great change. The villagers hardly knew her. In their artlessness they said, " Is this Naomi ? " She had come back empty — all gone —a widow—but she *came back*, back to the very fulness of God.

PAUL'S UNANSWERED PRAYER

II Cor. xii. 8–9. Psalm lxxxiv. 11.

"For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'"

This chapter opens with one of those strange glimpses into the other world that are given us now and again in God's Word. We are like persons standing in the cold and dark of a winter's night, when suddenly a door opens near by, and for one brief moment we see a blaze of light, we feel a rush of warmth, we hear music and the harmony of sweet voices, and perhaps get a glimpse of a kindly face. Before we realize what has happened, the door is shut and we feel the bitter air and blinding snow once more. As we go on our way, we find one or two words left in our minds. We think we can remember a little of the music. It seemed like something we had heard before, but we fail when we try to recall the strain. We pass on into the darkness and cold, pleased and yet not pleased, happy and yet unhappy.

We would all like to know something more of this strange entrance into Heaven, but we are told

very little. Paul himself could not describe it. All he says is—" he heard unspeakable words " ; and such was the glory of the visit that but for God's interference he would have been exalted above measure. Enough for us that he saw Christ.

Regarding this " thorn in the flesh," if we compare various things –Paul's blindness for three days, his inability to see who it was who spoke to him, the " large writing " or " large letters," mentioned in his Epistle to the Galatians (vi. 11)—it would seem his thorn in the flesh was that terrible form of inflammation of the eyes that is still known in the East, under which a poor sufferer becomes a burden to himself and to his friends.

We would speak about that view of his trouble taken specially in our text. It was a *lifelong* trial. The apostle had not an easy life, but there were trials that came on him at unexpected times and lasted only for a little. Like a storm they came and shook the house and like a storm they went, but the trial of our text was one that never left him. After his worst shipwreck he escaped safe to land. When he was beaten by the Jews he was dismissed. After a season of hunger he brake bread. Cold and naked, the very barbarians made a fire for him, showing no little kindness. But no matter where he was, on land

or sea, in the house of God or in the inner prison, there was always that " thorn in the flesh."

And so it is with us. Sooner or later—and to some it comes very early—there is a trouble or sorrow that is always there. It may be some weakness of body, some ever-present pain, some oft-recurring sickness. It may be the remembrance of a frustrated ambition, some disappointed hope, some buried love, or, worse than all, the remembrance of a very bitter day in life —of sin that has been repented of —or even sin of others unrepented of. There is this ever-present load. We have fresh sorrows now and again, the illnesses that mark our years, little harvests of pain, but underneath and over all there is always some root of bitterness. And God will not remove it. We pray thrice like Paul —aye, or three hundred times, and the trouble remains.

There are a good many prayers in the Bible that God refused to answer. But they were all prayers in which man's glory or man's advantage was the great thing. Moses wanted to see the Promised Land. Salome wanted the right-hand and left-hand seats for her sons in Christ's Kingdom. David wanted to build a house for God. I do not think a prayer for one's soul is ever rejected, let it be from the chief of sinners. God refuses to answer our personal prayers. How do

we know? That is for every one of us to find out. One thing I say, if our prayer is for our own pride, if it can only be granted in the way of sin, then it is a prayer God will not answer.

Yet God gives us something far better than we ask. What would Moses have gained in the Promised Land? Read in the book of Joshua and you'll see. God took him to Heaven, which was far better. The sons of Salome did indeed drink of Christ's cup. Paul got more than he sought – "Grace," which means "gift." God's gifts are part of Himself. "My grace is sufficient for thee."

THE WINE OF THE KINGDOM

MATTHEW XXVI. 29. PSALM CXVI. 13–16.

"But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

THIS is one of those passages that open up very strange questionings.

It reminds us of a part of Christ's life that was now past and speaks of a part which was to come. It is strange to think Christ was a partaker of human food for the thirty-three years of His life. I suppose there is nothing for which we profess to thank God more regularly than our daily bread, and, perhaps, nothing that we are really less thankful for. We know our Saviour was often hungry and thirsty, and we know with what holy joy the supplied meal was received. He brake the loaves, and blessed God, and gave thanks. It has often been said God gives us far more than He promised. He promises bread and water, yet He has surpassed His word. So in all His promises. There is something over, always a little meal in the barrel, a basket of fragments. It is in our daily food we have the most conspicuous instance of God's love. Whenever we

come to the need of a promise, there is always something better: bread and flesh for Elijah; bread and fish for the multitude; manna in the wilderness.

The text reminds us further that Christ ate and drank with men. You and I would scarcely condescend to eat with certain persons. Our dignity would suffer; but our Saviour always ate with His disciples; and when some Simon or other asked Him to dine with him He took them with Him. Indeed it was one of the charges laid against Him that He ate anywhere and with anyone. Now it has come to the last meal, for the Lord's Supper was His last meal, as if to show us how holy a thing our eating and drinking may be; as if to show the solemnity of the Ordinance. And as if to join His last command to the remembrance of a pleasure, it was not instituted till that very night in which He was betrayed.

It has often been wondered why our Lord appointed wine as the symbol of His blood, and men have imagined they were justified in the reckless use of it because our Lord so employed it. Ought we not rather, seeing in it a lively image of the wrath of God and of Christ's great agony, to refrain from making a common use of it? It had been an habitual beverage, and as if foreseeing how greatly we would pervert

it to our ruin, He added to it specially the remembrance of His dying love.

The last hour has come, and it shows how supremely human Christ was that the fact touched Him to the heart. He knew the sorrow He had to face, yet it was not that that vexed Him, for He knew also the joy that was to follow. Undoubtedly He was vexed for His disciples; for the sin, and the darkness, and the loneliness and trial before them, and most of all for this—that they must endure as seeing Him invisible. He would have liked to be with them, eye to eye, answering their questions, letting their head lean on His breast.

The question arises: Does the text refer to drinking wine in Heaven hereafter? We know the taking of food here is a proof of weakness and sin. Yet our Saviour Himself after He rose from the dead ate a piece of broiled fish and an honeycomb. We do not know God's power. In Heaven it shall be revealed in the greatest manifestation. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, all the Creative Majesty of God

But in another sense "My Father's Kingdom" refers to the state of the world after the completion of the work of redemption. We go through old experiences and make them new. Our Saviour takes part in every Communion Service. It is new to Him and new to every

saint. There is progression in God's Kingdom. The saint sees more of the evil of sin—more of the love of God. He receives new strength and joy—and Christ sees new growth in grace, new fruits of His love. Every Communion is a new feast.

DIGGING WELLS

GENESIS XXVI. 18. PSALM LXXXIV. 4–6.

"And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them."

THE well is a type of God's mercies. It is the way by which God protects a little stream. God keeps the water sweet and clean and cool. There are mercies which God brings to us as rivers—mercies which sweep past us like rivers that flow to the mighty deep, carrying ships to the sea and bringing ships inland; great highways, easing men of their burdens, delighting men's eyes, carrying their loads, cooling the summer heat. A river is a token of overflowing, superabundant love, and a symbol of God's might. It teaches men to find out the power of ruling it and binding it to do their work in many ways. So to speak, a river is the work of God alone. Man finds it ready for his use. But he must dig for wells. In this he is a fellow-worker with God, so that God and man may rejoice together.

Sometimes a well is digged in a time of trouble. We may not always tarry by the rivers. God allures us into the wilderness. We have to

possess the land of His promise. He sends us heat and drought and weariness and faint-heartedness; then we find that Christ has opened a fountain; He has given us the key and shown us the way to the very heart of God.

And saints have opened wells. They have found new outlets and new inlets for God's love. The well of daily walking with God like Enoch; Isaac's well of patience and submission; Jacob's well of pleading prayer. Whatever land we may be in, there we find there has been a man before us who has digged a well. A new view of God, a new use of a text, a new phrase, a new experience, a trial overcome, every wise book—these are all wells re-digged.

Every man is sent into the world to open up a new well, and the greater the man the greater number of wells will he open. The man who strengthens your faith, who makes you hope, who makes a passage in Scripture that you once hated, fresh and rich; the man who revives a godly custom, is one who re-opens the old wells.

ABRAHAM ENTERTAINING STRANGERS

GENESIS XVIII. 2. PSALM XXXIV. 7.
"Lo, three men stood by him."

How very wonderful life must have become to Abraham!

He had found that heaven and earth were very near one another. The veil had been drawn aside repeatedly, and greater things were yet to happen. He had now accepted God for himself and for all his house. He would trust and wait.

Once before, in an hour of thick darkness, he had had a vision. Now he is specially honoured in the ordinary work of his life, as he sat sheltered from the noon sunshine at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. The habit of hospitality was strong in Abraham (although he had made little by his kindness in the past). Ninety and nine years of age, he was yet willing to entertain strangers. There came—it would seem, quite suddenly—three men to him. Hitherto God had appeared Himself. In coming ages the Angels were to be His messengers. Does it not

look as if they had only gradually entered into His purpose? God Himself, the Saviour, comes with them. There is nothing He will ask them to do that He will not do Himself. What strange thoughts those Angels must have had! How closely they are admitted into the Divine fellowship! But God is ever higher than the highest, so Abraham sees at once there is One Mighty amongst them.

I think it ought to vex us that we don't seem to make friends with strangers as men used to do. Of course, circumstances are different; yet the Devil manages to get hold of strangers. There are people in need in our streets every day, in sorrow and in sin, and we don't see them. We should ask God to give us grace to see and seize opportunities of being kind to strangers. "Pass not away." God is still to be met at the tent door. "Let a little water be fetched and wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree."

God knows what human experiences are. He accepted all these things as they were offered. The day was to come when no water would be given Him—when a tree would be His Cross.

Even in the Divine life there are anticipations of what is to come to pass.

We see how God delighted to watch all that Abraham did—his energy, his kindliness, his

courtesy, his readiness. He has recorded it all. He loves a cheerful giver, and there is no kind act, no meal prepared, no cup of water given to any poor body, but God has taken note of it.

JOHN'S HUMILITY

REV. VII. 14. PSALM CXXXVII. 1.

"These are they which came out of great tribulation."

THE Apostle was astonished at this great multitude; at the variety of face, diversity of origin, which not even their glorified countenance could hide, their humanity, their purity, their triumphant shout of victory.

When the elder asked him, "Who are these?" and he answered, "Sir, thou knowest," that does not mean that John himself did not know, for he had already recognized and described them; but he wished to hear the elder do so. That brings before us the humility of John. He was now an old man—nearly one hundred years old. Seventy years before, naturally impulsive, free-spoken, he had not scrupled to speak to Christ. He had lived in the closest intimacy with our Lord, and afterwards with our Lord's mother. He was the friend of Peter and of Paul—in many ways the superior of both. For at least thirty years he had represented the light of heaven on earth, he had faced death and passed through the fire unharmed. Well might he be compared to an

eagle, for he had dwelt on high, and gazed as no other man ever did on the Sun of Righteousness—gazed even through the wide-opened gate of Heaven. He had seen the Son of God, not through the veil of His humiliation, but in all His glory; was filled with the Spirit that he might come back from Heaven to tell us what neither Moses, nor Elijah, nor Paul, nor Angel, nor Christ Himself had told, about the glory thereof. One would say that even in that great multitude of martyrs there can have been very few to compare with John. More and more as we read this book, are we struck by his humility. You find the words —I heard, I looked, I saw, I beheld, I fell at His feet, I wept, I wondered—so to speak, he just brought vessels into God's Presence and let God fill them. The greatest day in a man's life is when he simply receives—opens his mouth and lets God fill it abundantly.

It was a wonderful day for the Angels to have one amongst them who was to be only a visitor.

The words of our text show the exceeding awfulness of sin. Tribulation to anyone must seem "great" to an Angel, for it was deserved by sin. Sin is the disease—and such a disease! Fatal on the very smallest point. The youngest child that ever entered heaven has passed through deadly perils.

The words show the sympathy of the heavenly

host. They prove that the Angels don't forget anything, that they know what we don't know. We are carried through tribulation and we are not aware of it. God puts His mantle over us. There are many here among us whose trials have been very great, and who, I feel sure, if asked to sum up their lives, would only answer—"Goodness and mercy."

THE SILVER TRUMPETS

NUMBERS X. 10. PSALM LXXXI. 3.

" Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets. . . . I am the Lord your God."

THE Hebrew year began in April, with the coming out of Egypt. Every month the trumpet blew, but specially at the beginning of the seventh month there was " the feast of trumpets," and this was the beginning of the business and political year.

The trumpet means the call of God. This chapter shows that there are special calls to individuals, and general calls to all the congregation. In our life there are the ordinary calls of God—the daily summons to duty and work. How sweetly and graciously He calls us forth ! We are so used to it we never listen to the tune. We get accustomed to it just as to any other noise. We speak of a commonplace day, yet the trumpet is played by the hand of a Master. What is the voice that summons us ? The rising of the sun, the dawning of the day, the voice of love in the family. To the majority of us the first call is to partake of our daily food, and Christ should be

known in the breaking of bread. It is a sweet thing to rise strong, refreshed, happy; to have had a good night's rest, with no woeful recollections, no shameful fears, no haunting dreads. "When I awake, I am still with Thee."

Sometimes there is a call of alarm. At New Year time, as at every other time of the year, the voice of God utters a very solemn cry to some, and it becomes us always to join trembling with our mirth. The mourners go about the street. It is often a time of loneliness. Some families may be reunited, others are broken up for ever. There may be an empty chair, a new grave, a mother, a brother, a sister, a little one, gone into the silent land. But remember the call has come from a silver trumpet, whatever God does is done holily and well.

But also, at the beginning of the year, the blowing of the trumpets was a sign of gladness. The feast of trumpets ushered in the great Day of Atonement. With us the Great High Priest is a risen and ascended Lord. It is therefore specially a time of praise. Even although there has been no sound of alarm, there is much to make us think. It is vexing that the year now passing away has closed another series of books with God; vexing when we remember its sins and its lost opportunities. We have lost not only the talent, and the talents it might have gained,

but the ever-increasing store of talents these in their turn would have gone on winning for ever. Now we have less time, less strength, fewer opportunities. The sight of the losses of the year, and the thought of the sins that we have planted that will bear bitter fruit may well appal us. So much good gone, so much evil in store! This year will rise again, not only at the Resurrection and the last day, but even here. Yet if our sins are very great, then our first call is to triumph in the Cross. Our iniquity was laid on One Who was able to bear it. Yes, there is plenteous forgiveness. The very voice of God proclaims it, the voice of the Great High Priest, the voice of all who are joint-heirs with Him. The trumpet sounds that, whatever else it sounds. It was God Himself Who first proclaimed the glad tidings, "This is My Son." He has given us the trumpet and the music. The one dominant note of Heaven, the one cry of God is—"This is My Son."

It is a call to prayer. We can't separate prayer and praise. They will be separated after the Judgment but not till then. The silver trumpet is made to sound minor notes. There will be none of them in Heaven. God sets the music for us here. He sends us our trials, our difficulties, our longings, and the Spirit Who knows the mind of God teaches us to pray.

Pilgrim Cheer

Therefore pray with all your might, giving a strong, clear, true sound, as from a silver trumpet of beaten work, without one complaining, harsh or querulous note.

And remember, the trumpet is already the call of victory. Whatever notes may be in it, the trumpet of God never plays a retreat. Let us make that one note in our song this New Year. I am going on to victory. "*I am persuaded* that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

JOSEPH AND MARY

MATTHEW I. 20. PSALM XXVIII. 7.

"The Angel of the Lord appeared unto him (Joseph) in a dream."

WHY in a dream? Why not by day? God did so partly in tenderness and partly out of necessity. Joseph was a good man, serving Him continually; and God had given him the holiest maiden in all the world. Mary must have been a woman of wonderful piety. It was, of course, God's free grace that chose her, and doubtless it was an honour that was not open to the world. It could only be given to a husband and wife of the tribe of Judah and of the family of David. There is a sense in which it is true that other women may be as famous at the last day as she. A girl born in our day who cleaves close to God, and serves Him with all her might, does all she can, and the best can do no more. Mary was blessed among women, and ever will be called so. But if she is at the last the greatest saint of all women, it is not because of the honour that was put on her, it will be because of the honour she put on God.

You may envy her being the mother of our

Lord, but we can say her life was full of trial from beginning to end. Look at what she suffered. She had to feel that she lay under the heaviest charge a woman could endure. She was betrothed to Joseph, and he believed she had lost her character and was going to disown her. It was a trial without parallel to both and therefore God sent an Angel to make Joseph's way plain. Evidently there had been a day of conflict, of heart-break, and Joseph had triumphed. His justice and love had asserted themselves. Justice and love—the very things God Himself delighted in! God does not afflict willingly. No doubt Joseph fell asleep through sorrow, with the tears on his cheek, thankful to forget his agony, thankful to postpone for another day the burial of his life's hopes. And we should have said, "If he sleeps, he does well." But God says, "I go to awake him."

God knows our anxieties. He will not keep us waiting one moment longer than is necessary.

No doubt, Mary, too, fell asleep weeping. She had freely surrendered herself to God. She knew she was distrusted and she could not blame Joseph. It was a trial to her to relinquish the godliest man she knew. But joy cometh in the morning—ay, before the morning the Angel loosed the bands.

The whole matter resolves itself into a question

of fellowship with God. He revealed to Joseph the fulfilment of His loving purpose. And there was to be no separation. " Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife."

GOD'S BURDEN-BEARERS

EXODUS XXV. 15. PSALM CXXXII. 8–9.

"The staves shall be in the rings of the Ark: they shall not be taken from it."

FOR fourteen hundred years the Ark was the actual representation of heaven, the reflection of the Divine glory, a revealing of what heaven was to be. But more than that—it was for centuries the actual dwelling-place of the Most High, the Throne of the Eternal, the Mercy Seat, the Throne of Grace, where the High Priest sprinkled the blood that made atonement, and where God gave pardon to the sins of His people. It was really God's dwelling-place, and in gazing at it now *we* are not dishonouring God, we are reminding Him of the great days of old, of the prayers of His saints and of their holy desires. We are reminding Him of the thoughts He had with His Son in glory. For there are things about the Ark that *we* see more clearly than the Israelites ever did; and we please God by turning aside and saying—"I will see this great sight."

The staves were to show the exceeding holiness of the Ark; they were to keep men from touching

it. It represented the holiness as well as the mercy of God. Marvellous as mercy is, unspeakably wonderful as is free grace, we can never forget that the Throne of Grace is a *Throne* —the throne of an offended God—offended not in the poor, paltry, sinful way we use the word, but grieved, dishonoured, disowned, cast off. The sinner makes light of sin, but the saint, while he clearly sees it to be blotted out, never ceases to have a growing sense of the horror and shame of it. Mercy Seat though it be, we must come—we will come if we come rightly—with downcast eye and humble heart. It was for that reason God smote the man who touched the Ark, and the men of Bethshemesh who gazed rashly into it. What an awful spectacle! The Mercy Seat—and from it the Wrath of God went forth! There is such a thing as coming too boldly—or rather, we may make the Throne of Grace a Throne of Judgment. There is mercy only for those who feel it is mercy undeserved, mercy for the chief of sinners, mercy procured by the death of the Lamb of God.

The Ark was never seen unless by the High Priest. When the tabernacle was taken down he covered it with the veil, and the priest spread the badger skins over it and over that a cloth of blue; even as between us and the throne of God in the heavens, so visible by day, so lit up by the stars

all night. What a covering of blue! How deep! How wonderful! How full of cunning work!

But the staves were visible—"They drew out the staves." God wished to show that the Ark was close at hand—the Throne of God and still a Throne of Grace.

Just as the flagstaff on the tower of the Residency at Lucknow symbolized the existence, courage, hope of the besieged garrison, and the greatness of the Empire whose servants they were, so, though little and plain, those staves of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, were the visible parts of something unseen that was grander far than all that was in the world besides.

Further, the staves show how willingly God uses men in His service. The work of salvation —the purpose, the plan, the performance—is all of grace. The Ark itself was made by men, its coverings by women, the tables of stone by Moses. The words were written by God. The glory was His, the skill was His. God could, in many ways, have made the Ark move—in a pillar of cloud, or in a fiery chariot, but He wished it to be borne on the shoulders of sinful men. What marvellous love! To bear the vessels of the Lord, to give oil for the light, to give up a precious stone and have it made a signal of a tribe or the medium of revelation! But to think of men carrying the very Throne of God! That was the object of

the staves—to carry the Ark wherever God wished, and God made men work out His purpose. It went everywhere. It chose out their resting-places, guided their movements, fixed the hour of going forth and the hour of encamping. It led them into battle; it passed before them in every hour of danger; it stood in the Jordan; it marched round Jericho; and four hundred years after it entered into rest and became a light to all nations. But wherever it went, men carried it. "The Lord helped the Levites that bare it." "*Go ye* therefore and teach all nations."

THE LAST OF THE LEVITES

ACTS XV. 39. PSALM CXV. 10.

"They departed asunder, one from the other. So Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus."

BARNABAS was the last of the Levites.

In Numbers xviii. we read of the inheritance appointed for the Levites; and how, by the faith apparently of one family, the cursed tribe became the most blessed and honourable. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance, and when He gives He won't take back until He is compelled. The priests and Levites had the grandest work of all the tribes. They had to stand between God and the people, to serve Him day and night in the tabernacle, and specially to look after the tribe of Judah. They had to deal with types and ceremonies—things that were a shadow. They were to continue till Christ came. But what work would there be after Christ had come? Amongst men, when a certain work is done, they are paid off. Their master has nothing further for them to do. Sometimes a servant may be kept on, as the priests were, after fifty years of age, getting easier work; or again, a man is pensioned, gets so much pay and nothing

to do. The pension is one of the burdens the master has to face. When God has a servant he neither lacks work nor honour. If he is too frail to go in search of work God brings it to him, as work was brought to Christ when He was on the Cross. If men wrong him, God does exceedingly more for him. So would it have been with the Levites when Christ came. They had long dealt with the shadow. God wished that now they should enter into His joy. They had had all the burden and care and anxiety and unpleasantness. They should have the first right to know the joy and rest. Who so likely to see the Lamb of God, the need of a perfect sacrifice of One to enter the Holy Places for Himself, as the priest and the high priest? Who again so likely to preach the gospel, expounding the Scriptures, showing that Jesus was Christ? It should have been their part to point out the true Lamb of God. God honours His own institutions. Caiaphas might have had the noblest name man ever had. The last high priest might have been the greatest and the best. But when men are offered the highest position and scorn it, they fall very low. We know that after they found Christ worthy to die the priests bitterly opposed His disciples, seeking false witness, persecuting them to the death.

Many of the priests, however, became obedient, and just as we have one at the beginning of

Israelitish history, so we have one at the end – "Barnabas, a Levite of Cyprus." The Levites shared the sorrows of their people. Some of their cities fell to the enemy, some were never conquered. They were scattered abroad. So we find Cyprus the home of Barnabas. The Levites had to show an example of liberality. They had to give up a tenth. But Barnabas, having land, sold it. He had no trade to fall back on, and to give up his possessions was noble. One is pleased to find the Levitical name departing from history so gloriously.

"A son of consolation." Here again he redeems the name of Levite. He was full of the Holy Ghost: not only warning and instruction, but comfort; most of all, comfort as the end of all warning, so gently so sweetly given, so graciously persevered in!

We have here a fine beginning to a life, giving up all and following Christ.

We owe him our love for three great things. First, for introducing Paul to the apostles. No wonder they were afraid to receive him. They were suspicious of him and believed not that he was a disciple. That is one way God honours us. No man stands out by himself independent of the world. The greatest and best of men are indebted to others. It is one form of greatness that is in reach of all.

Again—in finding out Paul's peculiar mission. At Antioch he saw the work of God and he sought out Paul, who seems to have been thrust aside or kept apart. He brought Paul forth on the first missionary journey. They went up to Jerusalem together and were solemnly set apart, the first Gentile Missionaries of the Church of God.

Lastly, in training Mark. That took its rise in an unhappy quarrel. Paul seems to have been in the right. Mark had played them false on their first journey and needed to be tried for a time. Barnabas was Mark's uncle, and his gentleness and forgiving disposition were carried too far. There was an outburst of anger --a " paroxysm " in the original—so hot that Barnabas and Paul had to separate. But God brings good out of evil.

Paul was now his own master, thrown on his own resources, impelled to use all his strength. Barnabas doubtless trained Mark. Friendship and gentleness and wisdom would come to discern the faults that kinship at first concealed, but faults that undoubtedly existed. Mark wrote his Gospel and was afterwards " profitable " to Paul in the ministry. Barnabas is not again mentioned but he lived in Mark and he lived in Paul.

THE SACREDNESS OF LIFE

EXODUS XX. 13. PSALM V. 4.

"Thou shalt not kill."

Is there not something startling in the form of the Sixth Commandment? God has begun to tell us, as it were, what our duty is to one another—"Honour thy father and mother." The next step is terribly abrupt. It hardly seems in keeping with the rest. If you were to caution a man so, would it not be regarded as insulting? It is one of the two or three Commandments that you and I pass over at once—as of an examination paper we say, "I can answer that, I'm all right there." It is meant evidently to call attention to the value of human life—to the value of all life. The Israelites were fresh from a land where they had been compelled to put their little ones to death. A sin that is common is thought little of—as in China, where children, especially girls, were thrown into the rivers to drown—where within the last few years men were willing to commit suicide if you gave them a few dollars, enough to provide two or three days' enjoyment

of some degrading kind. One person more or less would seem to matter very little.

But suppose there were no eternal life, how much the earthly life means! Take the life of Abraham, one solitary man. Not time itself would suffice to show its influence. Look at Moses—what a slender thread that life once hung by. Look at the great poets and writers who have made us all in great measure what we are. Look at the inventors, discoverers, the statesmen, the martyrs. One human life alters the whole course of a nation's history and affects millions of other lives. And every man who has ever made history was once a babe, whom a moment's inattention might have destroyed.

Further, all this might be true of any human life. You can't say of any child, " It comes of too bad a stock, its parents are too low in the social scale to have any descendant capable of influencing the world " ; nor can you say of any grown-up life that it has been so wasted that it can now do no good. From Rahab the harlot sprang David's Son and David's Lord. The oldest dying man may kindle a torch that will never go out. A dying criminal whose life is forfeited may by God's grace redeem at the last instant the whole of his life and, like the penitent thief, exhibit as no other ever did the glory of the Cross of Christ. The sickliest child may become a William the

Silent, Prince of Orange. The strongest mind may dwell in the feeblest frame. Life is a big thing; therefore "Thou shalt not kill." That is why God has so protected it. He has fenced it round and guards it by the severest penalty—"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."

"There is no fear of me," we say. Yet we are all in danger of other sins—and the sins and passions are all sisters, as one has said; the passage from one to another is very short. David broke the Sixth Commandment literally because he broke the Seventh. In the history of crime nothing has been more common than the road to murder through the greed of money. Those whose memories can go back a long way can see how all roads except the strait and narrow way lead to the broad road.

It is an awful thought that to *shorten* life is murder. The human body is a marvellous machine, but it is so easily ruined! The careless mother who neglects her infant shortens her child's life. The lad who does not develop his muscles and train hand and foot and eye and voice is shortening his own life. The man who drinks shortens his life and the lives of others.

There is no room for any one of us to boast.

SATAN'S LYING CLAIM

MATTHEW XII. 44. PSALM CXXXIX. 14.

"I will return into my house."

THAT is a very bold word for Satan to say. *My* house— a striking word. Let us look at his claim to it, and let us look at the house.

If a man says "This is my house," he implies that the house belongs to him, some way or other. He built it, or he bought it, or he pays a rent for it. Does a man belong to Satan in any of these ways?

I think we will all grant that Satan did not make the house to begin with. "Children are God's heritage." "We are not our own." "He did us make." Take the past history of a child reaching back thousands of years. The millions of gracious providences; the love of husband and wife; the love of mother and child; the heritage God prepares; the welcome He has ready for us when we come into the world; the love of parents, their unselfishness, their patience, such that they surrender companionship, rest, sleep, ease, all for the sake of a little one; the affection of brothers and sisters; the guardianship of Angels —all that

is ready for us. Think of the way God opens up the faculties, giving the child love and trust, making intelligence to dawn, giving beauty and strength, sight and hearing and speech, curiosity and memory. Has not the child a goodly heritage? Are not all God's dealings with it in the line of love? God takes His Own way with children, and how much they learn, how they grow, as long as they have Him for their Guide!

How does the Devil treat children? Corrupting, debasing, murdering them.

In an ungodly society, in a Sodom and Gomorrah, the birth of children is impossible. Look at Bethlehem: Satan and his instruments put all under two years of age to death, though well he knew Christ was not one of them. Our Saviour takes them in His arms, blesses them, prays for them, delights in their games, accepts their joy. Look at Satan: a child is deaf and dumb; "Oft-times he casteth him into the fire and into the water"; "and the devil cast him to the ground foaming—so much that they said, 'He is dead.'"

God never abandons that tenement He has made. Alike in sickness and in health, in work, in play, and in sleep, God claims and blesses the body. He is ever making life richer, fuller, more wonderful. To the mystery of youth He adds the love of husband and wife, the joys of companionship, the enthusiasm, the expectation, and all the

time He pleads for love in return. " My son, give Me thine heart." " Remember thy Creator."

Look at the gifts God gives in manhood. Have we not often ourselves been surprised ? We laid claims to our work in the world. We acted on our own judgment. We could give advice. We saw the way out of difficulties. We helped others.

Then the slow coming on of old age—the tenderness, the reverence, the gentleness, God's strokes falling like dew or flakes of snow. Does not God claim us to the last for time and for Eternity ? " Thou art Mine." But when the Devil takes possession, how rapid the blows, how terrible, how cruel. We are made an abhorrence. No chains can bind us.

It is a lying claim of Satan's to begin with. When God comes to us He speaks honestly, demands all our life, all our powers, all our time. But Satan pretends to want only a little bit. He takes a young lad and says, " I only wish you to have a little pleasure, once in a while ; don't go too far—an occasional Saturday—keep within limits. Don't lose your situation. Be all right in business hours ; don't make a fool of yourself." He pretends only to want lodging for an hour or two, but when he speaks behind your back, he says *My* house.

Why did he go out ? Because God made him go—partly for the sinner's own sake and partly

for the devil's sake. He goes out seeking rest in waterless places. Sometimes God's Angels leave a man—are driven out—but they have well-springs in God. They see His face, they stand in His presence, they excel in strength. For the devils there are only waterless places, and such is their rage and malice that they come back. The Devil entered into Judas. That was his house for an hour or two—what a fearful abiding-place! He has no home! What a multitude of homes Christ has—the Bosom of the Father, the House of Prayer. How many mansions!—every believer's body, every noble deed, every act of faith, every unanswered prayer, every cry for holiness, every labour of love, every confession of sin.

What house have you?

A SANCTUARY FOR THE PROVOKED

NUMBERS XX. 6. PSALM LXIII. 1–2.

"And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tent of meeting, and fell upon their faces, and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them."

A GREAT American preacher, Phillips Brooks, once commented in a very illuminative phrase on the words, "Until I went into the Sanctuary"—"A place of solved problems; the place to take all your difficulties to."

The presence of God is a Sanctuary for the provoked. We are all familiar with the phrase, "It's very provoking!" The tired mother working beyond her strength; the wife struggling to make ends meet; the man in business whose workmen disappoint him, whose customers won't pay their debts; the unappreciated mistress; the over-worked servant; the exasperated teacher—they all say it many and many a time. To all such I would say, When you are provoked go to the Sanctuary. Go to the prayer-meeting. Go and look at the Glory of God.

Was ever man so provoked as Moses was? This was no ordinary emergency. Was there ever such shameful unreasonableness, such ignor-

ance and presumption combined? In Egypt the children of Israel had cried unto the Lord by reason of their bondage. Their children had been drowned, themselves beaten, wages denied; and God heard their groaning. Ten mighty miracles one after the other God wrought for them; and now they say, "Would God we had died in Egypt. Then it was well with us. We remember the melons and the cucumbers, the onions, the leeks, the garlic and the flesh-pots." Had they not asked to be delivered? Did they not beseech Moses and Aaron to intercede for them? Did they not say, We have sinned? Now they deny their own words and misrepresent the words of Moses.

Think of their ingratitude. Moses had given up all for them. He had taken his life in his hand, going ten times into the presence of Pharaoh. He had given up possibilities the greatness of which we cannot reckon, when God wished to destroy the people and make of Moses a greater nation than they.

In their distress Moses and Aaron went into God's presence, and when there would not the remembrance of their own sin come back to them? Would not Moses remember his own unbelief, his own unwillingness to obey God? Would not Aaron say, "Yes, *I* made a molten calf"?

A Sanctuary for the Provoked

Forty years Moses bore their provocation. How long did you say you had been provoked? And by how many people? Perhaps only by *one;* perhaps only for an hour, a dav, or at most, a month. May I ask, were you engaged at the time in special service for God?

Must not we have provoked God just as much as these Israelites provoked Him? We go before Him to accuse others; let us come away accusing ourselves.

PETER'S EXHORTATIONS

I PETER II. 13. PSALM CXIX. 73–74.

" Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man."

THE Christian religion brought its followers into combat with the civil powers. They might be tempted to think that Christ only was their King. Peter reminds them they have duties as well as rights. Kings have also their duties. Their work is set down very sharply here.

Every man is made in God's image and has rights and duties. We are to " honour all men." You can't judge a man by his dress. The noblest heart may beat under the poorest coat. If a man is my superior I honour him in obeying him where it is right, and by speaking respectfully of him and to him where I differ. If he is my equal I must speak well of him. If he is my inferior I must be neither harsh nor cruel to him. In lowliness of mind let us esteem others better than ourselves.

" Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear ; not only to the good and gentle but also to

the froward." "Froward" means a crooked person, like a winding road—you can never tell what the next turn will bring—one day wishing things this way, to-morrow just the opposite. If you are made of, and rewarded, why, anyone will serve under such circumstances. The whole beauty of the Christian character lies in this—to serve others for the love of Christ; to feel I am not doing this for money, but for the Saviour Himself. The meekness and gentleness of your conduct may be the means of saving your master's or your mistress's soul.

"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Christ on a solemn occasion had said to Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." So Peter wrote his Epistles, which were simply letters, to encourage and cheer the early Christians. His object was to make them pluck up heart, not to be cast down, not to give in; and at the close of his first letter he uses these arguments. Satan can be overcome if we wish to overcome him. Peter knew his enmity, and there is no advice more needful than this—Be on your guard. But do not imagine you are fighting with an enemy who has not been overcome before. Moreover, you are not simply fighting for your own hand. The better and braver you are, so much the better for all

around you. The world is a battle-field. You are helping others and others are helping you. If one man flings down his arms, others do the same.

Then there follow words of wondrous consolation. Since Christ had said, "Strengthen thy brethren," nearly thirty years had passed—a great part of a man's life—and Peter had suffered terrible things, but he writes lightly of it: "After ye have suffered a while"—a little while compared with life, a little while compared with time, nothing in comparison with eternity.

The saints to whom this letter was sent, and the man who wrote it, have been released for eighteen centuries. Each century has seen generations coming and going. Is it not worth while striving, hoping, working, when we think of these words, "Called unto His eternal glory"? The phrase is enough to silence all unbelief.

And God will "perfect" us. Whatever gift we have here will be developed hereafter—even physical gifts—walking on the water, rising in the air. We shall have new senses, new powers. We shall see angels around us and have fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

The Epistle closes with a doxology. "To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." That is, we do wish God to be first, with all power and majesty, and we leave everything in His hand.

It is the strongest way of saying—" I love Him." " I bless Him."

Let us remember there is a word for you and me and every reader of this Epistle. We shall meet Peter and thank him.

THE GOLD OF THE TEMPLE

II CHRONICLES III. 6. PSALM XXVI. 8.
"And the gold was gold of Parvaim."

LET us note, first, the interest God takes in His Own House.

To David and Solomon it seemed an almost incredible thing that the Almighty God would condescend to dwell among His people. When an earthly king chooses to visit one of his commoner subjects his humility becomes immortal. What are we to say of God Who made heaven and earth consenting not only to visit us, but actually to *dwell* amongst us?

The story of the Creation of the world is told by God in one chapter, but when He describes the making of the Tabernacle it takes nineteen chapters, and those not short ones. Surely that proves the delight He has in His House. "For the Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation."

It is a place so dear to Him that our Lord on His first visit to Jerusalem tarried behind three days. He thought His parents might have

guessed where He was. "Wist ye not that I must be in My Father's House?" (R.V.)

Christ might have said, "I am greater than the temple." Yet there is not one of us, with all the burden of our sin to be forgiven, so eager as God manifest in the flesh was to be there.

Second, let us note the interest God takes in them that love His House.

One cannot read these chapters without seeing that God noticed every act of love that was done to His House. The gold was to be pure gold. There are different kinds of gold. When we come to His House we bring sacrifices—praise and prayer, "gold of obedience and incense of lowliness"—some joyfully and gratefully, all of us, we trust, with some measure of love in them. But let us ask ourselves, Is the gold of our land "good"? How much there is in that word Parvaim! Every stage through which that temple gold had passed God had watched. We don't know—nobody knows—where Parvaim was, but God knows. Every coin put into the Lord's Treasury has a history—a history got from you and me, and it may mean so much love, so much gratitude, so much toil—all known to God.

And, third, let us note God's interest in those outside His House.

The heathen have a place there. It is to be a

House of Prayer *for all nations.* "All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord, and shall glorify Thy Name."

JESUS AND HIS BROTHER

I Cor. xv. 7. Psalm lxix. 7–8.

"Then He appeared unto James." (R.V.)

There are three men spoken of in the New Testament of the name of James. One, the brother of John, was now in a martyr's grave. James the son of Alphæus we know almost nothing of. The third is James the brother of our Lord.

This text brings before us the perfect, the real humanity of our Saviour. It shows us that now in glory, at God's right hand, He does not sit as a superior person whose trials are all past, who is indifferent to any human sorrow.

I have often tried to show you how perfect our Lord's memory was after He rose from the dead. He loves to name His disciples and His friends—"Mary;" "Simon, son of Jonas;" "Thomas." He knows the old roads, the old familiar resting-places, the old language. He is in fact just what He was—only His work is completed and His sufferings ended—a man still, but glorified.

We see that specially when He appeared to Paul. Many years had passed since He had

entered into glory, but the years had made no change. He spoke in the old Aramaic tongue. He remembered His early home. "I am Jesus of Nazareth." To John in Patmos He appeared again, in vision, we do not know exactly how, to make sure beyond all controversy that it is for us He lives—exalted. He never forgets us.

But that appearance to James seems to imply far more. Christ's own brothers did not believe in Him. There was not only the personal grief of being misunderstood, distrusted, scorned, rejected, not only the want of human love, but the terrible fear that their souls might be lost. One does not know the whole story, but there must have been something far wrong in the household when He had to provide a home for His mother elsewhere. It is sad to think that when an apostle was needed to take the place of Judas none of Christ's own brethren was proposed—none evidently could be proposed.

It seems strange that there was no special appearance, so far as we can gather, to His own mother. The bond was not broken, for she must ever be His mother. Doubtless she saw Him along with the rest, but the full embrace is reserved for Heaven. Perhaps she could not have borne the glory. Christ acknowledged the family tie by appearing to James, who did not then believe on Him. As far as we can gather He had

appeared only to those who did believe in Him. Yet James was His brother, His erring brother, and from this time forth James is Christ's disciple, the bond-servant of his Elder Brother.

This reveals to us that even now Christ has a human heart. We are distinctly related to Him.

THE FORGOTTEN SHEAF

DEUT. XXIV. 19. PSALM XLI. 1.

"When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf, thou shalt not go again to fetch it; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless and for the widow; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands."

WE can't imagine God forgetting anything or any one of His creatures for one moment. Forgetfulness does seem to all of us a strange puzzle. It angers us in others and annoys us in ourselves, and this very anger and annoyance are a proof that we feel somehow we were not made to forget things, and there is no reason why we should forget. We remember perfectly for an hour—for a day—why not for a month or a year? There are many proofs that originally our memories were perfect. We never do forget our names, our trade, our homes. We remember all we need to know. By dint of labour we can force ourselves to remember. And we find things forgotten for years springing up into recollection, trifling things—a look—a gesture—in a way we cannot account for.

Forgetfulness, no doubt, to some of us is one of life's heavy trials. It consumes our time; it

provokes our temper ; it causes us loss ; it vexes others ; it makes us enemies ; it causes our word to be doubted ; it hinders our progress in knowledge ; it cuts us off from work for God ; worse still – it is an evil that propagates itself, for we forget that we forget.

To our first parents and to the holy Angels this result of the Fall must have been very perplexing and distressing. It is so to ourselves who have been used to it all our days. Yet herein has God commended His love and power and glory. There is no evil out of which God has not brought good. We see that conspicuously in the way God has conquered death. It was the greatest calamity brought on by sin. It shows us human weakness and corruption as nothing else does ; it shows us the wrath of God. Yet in no other thing is our strength made more manifest. The sting of death is so completely taken away that Paul says it is not only conquered, subdued, triumphed over—it is actually abolished. More than that—death has shown us God as nothing else could. Christ died –there is love –there is power –there is wisdom –there is righteousness. And as God has triumphed over the greatest curse of the Fall, so He has triumphed over all other results of the Fall. Let us think of the way in which He has triumphed over the curse of forgetfulness.

He makes blessings come out of it, as we see in our text. All the year the farmer works that he may gather in the sheaves. The little hills rejoice on every side. The vales with corn are clad. The ridges not only make the world more beautiful—they make hollows in which the farmer leaves a sheaf by mistake. God does not love waste, or carelessness, but He loves the poor and He loves the man who remembers the poor—who, like Boaz, pulls out handfuls on purpose for them. The farmer's forgetfulness is the orphan's opportunity. God wants us to help another, to be glad of helping one another. Our loss is another's gain. History is full of instances in which a man owed his success in life to his being ready to help another who had forgotten something.

It is a blessing to ourselves. Why, if ever a man deserved no credit for kindness it is the man who accidentally helps the poor. We did not mean it, but God opens the door for us, after it seems shut. If we acquiesce in what God has done, if we don't seek to undo it, then we are made sharers in the Divine blessing.

God actually turns forgetfulness itself into a blessing. Could you have endured life if the pain and anguish of certain days and nights in your past life were ever present with you? Behold the goodness of God: He makes you forget. He gives you, as it were, a waking sleep.

The Forgotten Sheaf

So the orphan forgets his loneliness, and the widow her anguish, and the stranger how far from home he is. They gather up the sheaf.

What am I not capable of forgetting? Therefore let that make me cling closer to God. David forgot his vows, and Peter forgot his. How many vows have you and I forgotten? We have need to pray the prayer of the penitent thief, "Lord, remember me."

THE POTTER'S FIELD

MATTHEW XXVII. 7. PSALM CXLVI. 9.

"And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in."

WE are taught by this strange story that sin follows us—it cleaves to us —we can't get rid of it. We see it all through the story of the Crucifixion — Pilate and the chief priests wanted Christ crucified, but they wanted others to have the blame of it. Each tried again and again to get out of the difficulty – Pilate found no fault in Him; he would release him; Christ did not belong to his jurisdiction; he would send Him to Herod. Christ comes back again. He will scourge Him and let Him go. At the last he delivered Him to be crucified. So with the priests. They sought false witnesses, but found none. When Judas delivered Him up, they were glad. Pilate said "His blood be on you." Judas said "I have sinned," and threw down the money, and they are just where they were. They thought they were done with Judas; now he throws all back on themselves. They have to take counsel, to talk it all over from the beginning.

The Potter's Field

So it was even after the Crucifixion; they sealed the stone and set a watch, and lo, Christ was risen from the dead and things seemed worse than ever. So with all sin. There are a thousand things in life we can get done with, but sin cleaves to us. We try to forget it, we blame others, we dismiss the matter from our minds, but it is thrown back into our hands. The only way to get rid of sin is to ask God to cast it behind His back.

We can't get rid of the sinner. Every one of us is naturally eager not to be troubled with the sinner's concerns. If his sin puts us about, disgraces us, hurts our business, we will speak to him, but with his sin itself we want to have nothing to do. Now, we are to be followers of the Lamb of God. What did Christ do? He received sinners, nay, He went in search of them. He died for them. Many a Saturday you see men going from work straight to the public-house. Can you not put yourself about? It may shorten your afternoon, may deprive you of pleasure, but it will brighten eternity. If the sin of another is nothing to us, the difficulty will come to our own door and we shall be forced to think about that sinner's concerns.

Christ never seeks to get rid of us. His enemies mocked Him and He spoke words of majesty. They put Him between two thieves and one of them was redeemed. The very money that

was given for Him is consecrated to the world. It was His price– all He had, thirty pieces of silver, and with it they purchased a graveyard, the first and only one spoken of in the Bible. Surely there is something very touching in that. The grave looks cold and cheerless, but it is purchased by Christ's blood. It is a field of blood. It belongs to Christ and is specially dear to Him. He died for it. It is a mansion prepared by Him. God watches it every moment.

" To bury strangers." You see the pride, the cruelty of the Pharisees. Polluted money ! but good enough for even holy men who were not Jews. " The potter's field " - a waste land, an exhausted sand-pit, worth only thirty pieces of silver –good enough for the stranger. God rejoices in being the *stranger's* God, and I would commend that thought to all of you, especially to you who have sons and brothers abroad. The thought, the fear, of death haunts you. Remember the strangers' field is purchased by the death of Christ.

A DAUGHTER OF ABRAHAM

LUKE XIII. 16. PSALM CXLVI. 8.

" Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day ? "

THIS is one of the women whose names are not given, in order that whenever we mention them we may be forced to describe them.

She would be known in all that region, no doubt, as the woman who was so terribly bent. It meant trouble at one time –it certainly meant constant inconvenience. It meant the loss of agility ; it meant the loss of conpanionship ; it meant a dark outlook ; it meant the loss of many a lovely sight –sun, moon and stars, and soaring birds and happy human faces. What a contrast there is between Christ and man ! We try to get rid of those who are in trouble. We forget the dependence, the loneliness of old age. Christ says " I will be with thee." " Even to hoar hairs I will carry you." Eighteen years ! And all that time she would be known to the young people as the " old woman with the bent back."

Perhaps there are some of you here that are impatient because you have had things to vex

you. Look sometimes round about you, and be humbled and bless God.

But her history was a still sadder one to God. "Whom Satan hath bound." Satan had sought to have her. We can't tell all the meaning of this phrase. It does not mean she was a wicked woman, but it means she was a sinner like us all. Perhaps it refers to some special sin. Many a one is bound by a lifelong injury, a lifelong weakness, through the sins of ungodly parents. Eighteen years of pain to the sufferer, but before that years of dishonour to God!

"A daughter of Abraham"—that means character. Why, that was the very highest character Christ could possibly have given her. A daughter of Abraham means one full of his spirit and of his faith. Abraham was a man in high position, a conqueror of kings, an entertainer of Angels, the friend of God, the founder of a nation. This woman was a poor object, yet she inherited the same spirit and the same reward. So we read in the New Testament that those who are said to come nearest to Abraham are the beggar Lazarus, the publican Zacchæus, and this woman.

We see her faith in her clinging to the House of God. There would be little entertainment for her in that synagogue where the ruler was one of the most contemptible hypocrites in the New Testa-

ment. Not many things prove so clearly a person's relation to Christ as the love of God's House.

She "glorified God." What more could be said of any human being? To glorify God was the chief end of man—the chief end of Christ.

IS PAUL A BOASTER?

II Cor. xi. 25. Psalm lxviii. 11.

"Thrice I suffered shipwreck."

It is a rule in naval warfare that a captain is to keep his eyes open and tell all that he has seen, and report every heroic deed. There may be circumstances in which a man is bound to tell what he passes through. The traveller who opens up a new world has a right to make his narrative as interesting as possible. A father should tell his boys what he has seen and heard in life, to enrich their experience, to prepare them for emergencies, to strengthen courage and hope. As persons with intelligence, whatever experience we may have had, let us pass it on. And it is my duty if I am in company with any man who has had a notable experience, to tell about it, to make him as interesting a figure as I can. Much more is it my duty if I can say something to the praise of God's grace—if I can say, Here is one to whom God showed great love.

One wonders why Luke did not tell of these wonderful adventures of Paul. Why could it be but this –they were talking of something else.

One thing filled their minds—one thing they did. The mother who is in search of her lost child does not stop to gossip, nor watch the grandest procession ; she has eyes and ears only for her lost child.

The modern traveller tells you everything. An accident makes him a hero in his own eyes, but Paul is shipwrecked *thrice*, and Luke never mentions it, and God never mentions it. There was something far grander, something infinitely more important to speak or write about than that. Christ had died to save men. The world had been opened up. Those shipwrecks had happened as Paul went to tell the Gentiles that God was their God. When he thought of Christ putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, enduring the wrath of God, what was a shipwreck to that ? What was a night and a day in the deep compared to those hours of darkness on the Cross ?

And when Paul himself mentions these experiences afterwards it is because the Corinthians have compelled him to. He has to do it in self-defence ; and when he thinks of it he says, " I am like a man out of my senses, I am ashamed to speak of this." Christ had put His mark on Paul and the thought of Christ fills the apostle with admiration and love and shame.

What a small outlook the man has who is proud of a little thing—proud of his appearance, his

wealth, his dress, or his wit. What a little soul a woman must have to whom her own dignity or interests are everything. If the apostle's shipwrecks are not worthy of being mentioned, how dare we speak of little things?

"Three shipwrecks; a night and a day in the deep." Paul didn't know when he wrote that, that there was another shipwreck in store for him, a shipwreck that was to succeed fourteen days of tempest in Adria, a shipwreck that was to interest all men to the end of time, that was to bring him visions of God and discoveries of grace, a shipwreck that was to usher in the last and most glorious epoch of his life. The best of God's love to him was all to come. And that is true also for you and for me if we are the children of God. Let us call up the past—stir up our memory. God has delivered me out of six trials: there may be a bigger one before me that God will not suffer to overwhelm me. I have new mercies, undreamt-of mercies all to come. Paul's Epistles to the Romans, Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, Timothy, and Titus were all yet to be written, and after them a triumphant witness for Christ and a glorious death at the hands of Nero! The biggest mercy will be the last. One step more and the saint enters heaven with a song of triumph.

LEARNING TO PRAY

LUKE XI. 1. PSALM LV. 17.

"As John also taught his disciples."

THIS seems an extraordinary request. It would seem prayer was a lost art. It was a prayerless age. Yet the Old Testament is full of prayers. Indeed, I know not that there is a saint in the Old Testament whose life is told at any length whose prayers are not recorded. There is one whole book of prayers, the book of the Psalms—one might say that when we pray it is as much in Old Testament words and after Old Testament models as in those of the New Testament. Our prayers to God for mercy, specially in the greatest moments of sin, are from the Psalms. For ejaculatory prayer in an emergency, there is nothing better than Nehemiah's prayer. For prayers for others, we go to the books of Moses. For the manner of prayer —its boldness—we go to Abraham interceding for Sodom. For a word to describe the closeness and earnestness of prayer, we go to Jacob wrestling. In Daniel we see the courage of prayer, the immediateness of answers—"Whiles I was praying." If there is

anything a man might learn from the Old Testament at all, one would say it was how to pray.

And yet men did not know how, simply because they were blinded by custom. The Pharisees prayed oft, and they prayed long, and were only too glad to get a listener. But it is when you begin to read the Pharisee's prayer that you see how completely men were out of it. From every point of view, if one compares it with the Lord's Prayer one sees how far off he was. The great distinguishing point of the Lord's Prayer is first of all the Fatherhood of God. No Old Testament saint had said personally " Our Father." It was a Name for the race to use, or for the whole family to use; but men had not gripped that idea of our personal relation of sonship to God. In the Pharisee's prayer there was no humility. He looks on others only to scorn and slander them. From beginning to end there is not one bit of it that we can use, and that had got to be the type of prayer! Men learn to imitate prayer more than anything else and they got to believe that that was prayer, and the whole Old Testament to the contrary proved nothing to them. So one of the first things John had to do was to teach men to pray.

We should have said that the best example of prayer he could give was his holy life and his

martyr's death. But we must be on guard against thinking that it is enough just to have a prayerful spirit. People sometimes say—"I'm always praying. I can pray when I am doing my work." I hope you all do that. But there must be certain definite times of prayer. It was our Saviour's meat and drink to do the will of His Father. If ever *Laborare* was *Orare* it was true of Him Who went about doing good, Who had not so much leisure as to eat bread, Who knew no sin. Yet He had set times for prayer. And here (v. 1.) it actually says—"When He had ceased."

It is a great marvel that prayer can be taught. That shows us the richness of the Holy Ghost—that in the matter of infinite grace and love He is like the other Persons of the Trinity. We see how God makes us as far as He possibly can fellow-workers with Himself. There is only one work that God and God only can do, and that is the actual work of atonement. But He loves to give us of His Own. So here it is that the Holy Ghost, though men did not know much, if anything, about Him, teaches them what to say. And in the case of John's disciples the Holy Ghost taught John and John taught them. We are made partakers of the fulness of God.

A father or mother teaches a little one to pray. They represent God. John himself had been taught to pray. He was the child of prayer. It was

while people were praying that the promise was given to his father. But he was also taught by solitude and suffering. He was kept waiting thirty years in the desert with rough raiment, poor food, and none of the ordinary pleasures of men.

The best way to learn to pray is just to pray, and to have need of prayer. When we are young we pray like our fathers and our ministers. But as we grow older we have sharp trials. We must pray, and in one hour the old forms and customs which were just like grave-clothes are laid aside; we are loosed, and our spirits are let go. John waxed strong in spirit. Yet he had a life of trial, trial to the very last.

The great feature of John's prayers would be their honesty and reality. There was nothing of pretence in what he did. His words, his life, might be described in his own sentence—"The axe is laid to the root of the tree"—"Repent"—"Be content"—"It is not lawful"—"He must increase"—"Behold the Lamb of God"—"Generation of Vipers"—"Whose shoe latchet"—"Art thou He that should come?" The same directness belongs to his disciples. Two of them come to Jesus and say—"Rabbi, where dwellest Thou?" Straight to the point. And the answer is as straight—"Come and see."

How wonderfully prayer is answered. John

taught his disciples and they taught others. They prayed to Christ and Christ taught them the Lord's Prayer. John called himself a Voice, a Voice crying. A Voice passing away, and yet the echoes, the teaching of that voice, remain with us to this day.

STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD

I Cor. iv. 1. Psalm li. 13.
" Stewards of the mysteries of God."

The word steward here is " oikonomos," which means the head servant or housekeeper, one who has charge of the keys and is responsible to the master of the house not only for himself but for those under him. Our word " economy " comes from it. Now a minister of the Gospel in his dealing with divine things should be like a wise manager of a house. Faithfulness is required. It is wonderful how much love and grace can be shown in the management of a home, however humble. A godly, wise woman takes delight in her house, first of all for the honour of her husband and for the love she has to him. A wife is a man's noblest possession, the greatest prize he can win on earth. She is the measure of his wisdom. She has his honour in her keeping. The better she is the more he is thought of. A wise woman will not seek her own ease or comfort. She lays out her money to the best advantage. She takes delight in preparing meals, studies to provide

variety, delights in having little surprises. We all know the woman whose whole life is a kind of put-off, who exercises no forethought, who never seeks to learn, who thinks a meal may be got ready in ten minutes, or even after the hour is struck, the woman who does not make her husband's honour and comfort the work of her life. A wise woman will make the most of what she has. She knows her husband needs strong food for he has hard work to do. There are inducements enough for him to stay away. Her hoard may be little but her heart is great. Not always the same meal, nor yet, perhaps, always what her husband and children would like. Still less what she herself would always prefer. She lays past in time, begins in time, looks upon her home as her great care.

What a glorious position to be a steward of the Mysteries of God! Just as at meal times there are hungry children and a tired husband to be fed, so on a Sabbath day and weekday there are souls thirsting after righteousness; or, at least, hungry, dissatisfied, disappointed, craving for something, more than hungry, famishing, it may be dying. It will not do to give them just solid food, it must be wisely, skilfully prepared. It took God months to make the food ready. It grew wondrously, night and day, under rain and sunshine. We, too, must do our best. The wise house-

keeper will regard the seasons. She will not be taken at a loss, knowing that nothing is sure but the unexpected, having everything ready, and knowing where to find it. There is nothing more beautiful than a woman's clever, loving management.

One thing the minister of Christ always has, and that is the infinite provision in God's storehouses. There is all in God's treasures that we can possibly need. And He gives us full permission. "He hath flung me the keys of a full pantry." The more you take out there is the more put in. I suppose the poor widow at Zarephath could give a handful of meal to her neighbours as well as have one for herself.

A man with boundless resources to fall back on may well be generous. There is no need to keep thoughts over. It is manna from God's storehouse. You will get it fresh every day. "Ye have not, because ye ask not." It is a terrible reproof to us ministers that we get exhausted, with an infinite God and an open door and a hearty invitation. The Bible is not a shallow book, nor a book of simply great depth. God Himself has not richer stores to fall back on than we have. There are some laid past for hereafter—laid past for Him, too—but there are stores for all time, and for all who are to come after us.

But the servant himself must hunger and thirst.

He can't find out the treasure unless he himself be a godly man. The great theologians have been much tried men.

The honour of the house is in the steward's keeping. God is on his side. God wants the provision eaten. He and He only knows the needs of people. He tells the minister what the minister himself cannot find out.

" A small thing to be judged by you." That is not spoken in contempt. The man who says that ordinarily means that his own judgment is of more importance than any other's. Paul says—It is God I care for. And he has such a sight of God's love and such a dread of God's holiness that everything else passes out of sight.

YET THERE IS ROOM

JEREMIAH VIII. 20. PSALM LXXXVI. 15.
"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

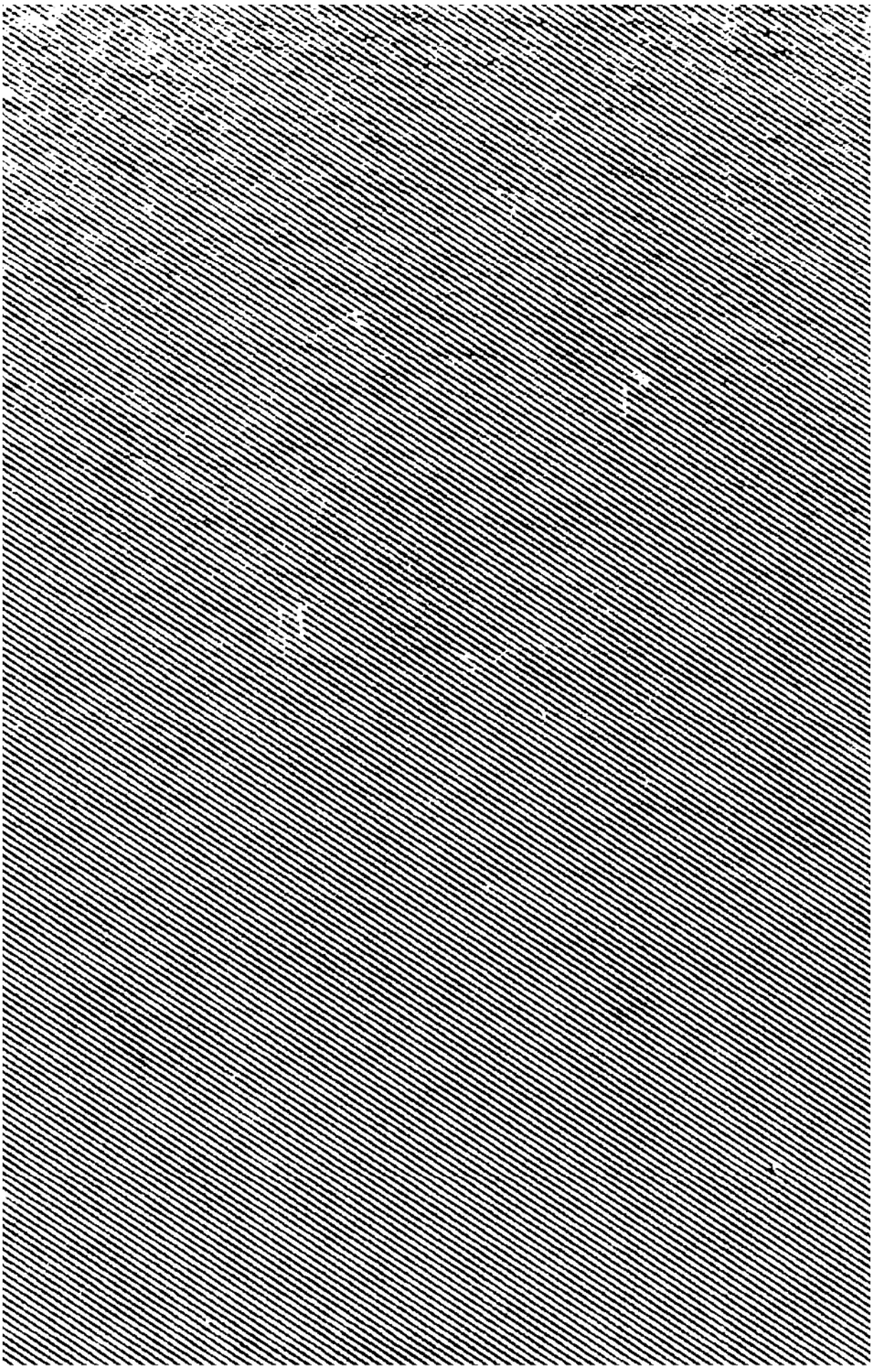
WHEN winter comes many of us feel downhearted, our spirits cannot help sinking. As long as autumn is with us there is a subdued cheerfulness. The fields from which the grain has been gathered have still a golden glow. The leaves on the trees and on the pathways, though dead and dying, are more wonderful in colour than ever they were in summer. The days are still as long as the nights. It is the time of the ingathering of fruit; the labour of the year has been rewarded.

But when winter comes the gold of the fields is tarnished; the leaves have lost their fire and are withered and brown; the hills are white with snow; the wind is cold, and the rain pitiless. The night has begun to encroach on the twelve hours of the day, and yet for fifty days the light grows scantier and dimmer. We have a long dark outlook, and the minds of many are harassed as they look forward to cold and hunger and darkness and want.

And, alas! still more does the soul feel chilled and cast down. It is in the winter months we are most anxious for sinners. "Pray," said Christ, "that your flight be not in the winter." Our surroundings are gloomy. The mind suffers with the body. In summer-time there are a hundred things to interest us—life itself is a joy. But when the long dark days come and we sit like Peter shivering at the fire, then, alas, we are tempted to deny our Lord.

Especially as a Christian congregation, when we think of another year passing away are we compelled to put this question: How many of us are saved? It is the most disagreeable of all questions: disagreeable alas! because it has been often put by disagreeable persons – put very often unwisely. No wonder the devil tries to make us hate it. We have an uneasy feeling– a feeling that if we turn to God life will be a long penance of prayer and reading the Bible, a life of misery and gloom. To the unsaved man it is so, but to those who love God life is full of joy. Prayer, our daily tasks – everything is transfigured.

Some people think God does not wish to save them. To such I would say, You must never think of yourselves as the victims of fate. Be firmly convinced God wants to help you. What are we here for? You can't imagine greater love than the Father sending the Son into the world to die

for sinners. There never was one saved yet who was not redeemed at an infinite cost. Have you gone astray in the past? Have you yielded to the devil? Turn a defeat into a victory. Have you lost heart? Do you say: "It's too late; we are not saved?" Ah, yes; but the text does not say we are lost. We are not lost. Still there is time—still there is room. There is only one thing sure in the world. We are not sure of life, or health or memory. The only sure thing is—you and I may still be saved.

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